Journeys through Romance Space: The Role of Horses, Ships, Tents and Cities in Middle English and Old French Romance

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Abstract

This thesis explores four aspects of transportation and setting in Middle English and Old French romance: horses, ships, tents and cities. Despite the fact that they have to varying extents been previously neglected by literary critics, these topics prove interesting, not only in their own right but also for the contributions they make to the structure of a romance tale.

Horses and ships are the subjects of the first two chapters, and are seen to function quite differently from each other as modes of transport for romance heroes and heroines. The wide range of story motifs in which they feature (often topoi developed from earlier literary sources) is indicated. In addition, I discuss the horse in its role as far more than a simple means of transport, in the instances when it is elevated to near-human status and may even be considered a protagonist in the story.

Tents and pavilions are examined in the third chapter and found to be a remarkable form of portable setting, capable of transforming space in a number of fascinating ways. A survey is made of the many different scenarios in which they commonly appear, ranging from martial contexts and tournaments to backdrops for amorous liaisons. The thesis then concludes with a study of two texts, *Le Bel Inconnu* and *Partonope of Blois*, which are unusual because each features a city (or cities) as a prominent location. I ask why urban settings are uncommon in romance and look at how the two authors accommodate such static space in their tales of romance.

My first three chapters focus on various aspects of the knight errant's journeying (typically at the centre of any medieval romance), while the final chapter seeks to understand if such a hero can ever be accommodated in an immobile cityscape.

For Mum and Dad, although the horses are for

Hilary, and the ships for Mark

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original, except where indicated by special reference in the text, and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other academic award. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: ..... DATE: .....

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Contents

List of Abbreviations

CFMA	Classiques françaises du Moyen Age
CUER MA	Centre universitaire d'études et de recherches médiévales d'Aix
EETS	Early English Text Society
ES	Extra Series
SS	Supplementary Series
MED	*Middle English Dictionary*, ed. by Hans Kurath, Sherman M. Kuhn, Robert E. Lewis and others (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001)
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*
SATF	Société des anciens textes français
STS	Scottish Text Society

Introduction

This dissertation has arisen from an interest in the landscape of medieval romance and the way in which various elements of that landscape, or literary topoi, are fitted together to provide a backdrop with which the characters interact. My study focuses in particular upon two forms of transport, the horse and the ship, and two types of setting, the tent and the city. The division between setting and transportation is not of course absolute, since a ship is not only a simple device to move protagonists between different places but may also become a setting for action and adventures in its own right. Tents, too, resist classification: they cannot be considered a straightforward place-type since they are actually mobile objects that are superimposed upon pre-existing landscape. The tent-owner's act of setting up camp consequently often changes the nature of the space in which the tent is situated. Tents and pavilions thus stand in sharp contrast to other romance loci, particularly the city which is so evidently stationary and much more permanent. Horses and ships form another interesting pairing; on one level they operate similarly in the romance narrative, as both are important for moving the hero to new adventures. The fact, however, that the horse is a living animal understandably leads to it being treated in an entirely different manner from a ship or boat. Different types of journey may be signalled according to whether a hero travels over water or on horseback, and he will generally feel far less in control of his direction when travelling by ship than on a horse.

I have chosen these four romance components because I believe each is not only of considerable interest in itself but will additionally reveal a great deal about how romances function. Horses, ships, tents and cities are usually viewed as part of the background scenery, or as narrative mechanisms that enable a knight-hero to be swiftly relocated according to the particular exigencies of the story. As such, they are often taken for granted and not studied closely in their own right, even though they may be essential for the plot to function. A number of interesting and detailed studies have been produced on the most frequently occurring topoi of romance, such as the forest and castle, and also on particular motifs in which the ship of romance is involved (most

notably the theme of the rudderless boat).[1] Relatively little, however, has been written concerning the role and function of horses, ships, tents and cities across the range of contexts in which they appear in romance. I will outline in more detail, at the beginning of each chapter, the breadth of critical work already produced within the area. With the exception of ships, I have found that, especially in English, little has been written on the topics I have selected. Even the more abundant studies on cities, tents and horses that exist in French naturally tend to concentrate upon Old French literature, and so these motifs have been largely ignored in Middle English works. My thesis will therefore focus upon Middle English romance and aim to contribute to knowledge of these somewhat neglected topics.

It would be rather contrived, though, to look at English texts in isolation from their analogues and sources when much of the Middle English romance corpus consists of translations or adaptations of French and Anglo-Norman originals. Although my primary interest is Middle English romance, I try, wherever possible, to look at sources in order to compare and contrast. All the same, in general I concentrate on the English texts, believing along with Faral that there is value in this, even if some texts are highly derivative:

> Quoi qu'aient connu de l'antiquité les clercs de l'époque, on saura qu'il faut se garder de vouloir tout expliquer par cette connaissance, même dans les poèmes qui ont été directement inspirés par des oeuvres anciennes; on se rappellera qu'en tout ouvrage dérivé une bonne part revient à l'initiative propre du traducteur ou de l'adapteur et à sa façon personnelle d'entendre son modèle ... .[2]

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[1] See, for example, Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter, *Landscape and Seasons of the Medieval World* (London: Elek, 1973); Alain Labbé, *L'Architecture des palais et des jardins dans les chansons de geste: essai sur le thème du roi en majesté* (Paris: Champion, 1987); Faith Lyons, *Les Éléments descriptifs dans le roman d'aventure au XIII^e siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 1965); Manfred Gsteiger, *Die Landschaftsschilderungen in den Romanen Chrestiens de Troyes: literarische Tradition und künstlerische Gestaltung* (Bern: Francke, 1958); Marie-Luce Chênerie, *Le Chevalier errant dans les romans Arthuriens en vers des XII^e et XIII^e siècles* (Geneva: Droz, 1986); Uwe Ruberg, *Raum und Zeit im Prosa-Lancelot* (Munich: Fink, 1965); Corinne J. Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993); *The Medieval Castle. Romance and Reality*, ed. by Kathryn Reyerson and Faye Powe (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1984); Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), particularly Chapter Two, 'Providence and the Sea: "No tackle, sail, nor mast"', pp. 106-36.

[2] Edmond Faral, *Recherches sur les sources latines des contes et romans courtois du moyen âge* (Paris: Champion, 1913), p. viii.

Faral refers here to the French adaptations of classical sources, but the same logic – that the translator makes significant contributions to his text – holds true for the Middle English authors who were working from earlier French texts. In any case, there are numerous instances in which we are unsure of the origins of a tale, or the particular version used by the English adaptor has been lost. I wish, therefore, not only to build a picture of the trends in Middle English romance relating to my chosen topics, but also to give some indication of how this compares with the French corpus in particular.

To deal with each of these four themes exhaustively will evidently not be possible within the constraints of the word limit and so, in order to create a workable study, I have opted for the following approach. My first chapter is a study of the horse, particularly in its role of indispensable adjunct to the knight. I aim to look at as many sources as possible in order to build an overview of the range of possibilities of the horse for the romance author, and also include some more detailed case studies of remarkable hero and horse partnerships such as Gawain with Gringalet, Bevis with Arondel, and Alexander with Bucephalas. The horse is clearly valued much more highly than a simple means of transport and it relates to, and influences, the character of its rider in various interesting ways. Even the very fact that the rider is raised from the ground empowers him and sets him apart from people of a lower class; the high market value of a good charger is also a clear signal of a man's status. The relationship between man and beast is often developed even further in romances, however, and I will look especially at the extreme reached in some instances when a sentimental partnership is formed between rider and horse, and the animal is often endowed with human qualities and intelligence. Although my main focus is on the knight and his horse, I also consider whether it is possible for a woman to be involved in these special bonds that are formed between man and animal. Women are often the donors of remarkable horses, and I explore the varying significance of the topos of the gift-horse, depending on the identity and relationship of the giver and recipient.

My second chapter moves to a consideration of ships and boats in medieval romance. It investigates the type of characters who sail in boats and ships, in what circumstances, and how the journey over water relates to the narrative as a whole. One

issue that is taken into account when looking at the medieval representation of such voyages is the long and influential tradition of stories of sea travel, and superstitions arising about the sea and storms. The act of placing oneself at the mercy of very changeable sea conditions understandably encourages more pressing thoughts about God's or the gods' powers over man, so I will also look more closely at the effects on a romance narrative of religious beliefs. In particular, the popular motif of setting an individual adrift in a rudderless or unseaworthy vessel as a form of punishment is often imbued with Christian ideas of God's guidance and protection of the innocent in an apparently hopeless situation.

Despite the weight of critical attention that this motif has attracted, it is by no means the only context in which ships appear in romance. Although the figure of the knight is virtually inseparable from his horse, this chapter demonstrates that voyages by ship are far more common than might be imagined. Dramatic episodes of shipwreck and trouble at sea occur in many romances, even if sometimes as fairly minor incidents. More significant are the magical self-propelling boats of romance over which the hero has no control but which generally act in his interests. It will be seen that they fit well with the ethos of chivalric romance precisely because of the required element of submission from the hero; he must be prepared to accept the adventure, whatever it may be and wherever the mysterious ship takes him. Boats also have a strong association with the dead; in a number of romances corpses travel around in them and continue to 'speak' to the living, whether it is simply because they wish to explain the circumstances of their demise or to demand vengeance.

Chapter Three marks a change in direction from means of transport to setting, but continues the focus on travel and mobility by offering a summary of the usage of tents and pavilions in medieval romance. The various words used to designate tents and pavilions are discussed, but the terminology is not found to have much consistent specificity in either medieval French or English, and I therefore use the terms 'tent' and 'pavilion' more or less interchangeably, just as medieval writers seem to have done. This chapter concentrates on romances in which tents play a significant part in the landscape and plot, and I ask if there are differences in the treatment of tents to be found

between French and English texts. I explore the characteristics of the romance tent, by looking at who uses such structures, for what purposes and in what contexts. Several patterns soon emerge; even a brief reference to tents and pavilions can swiftly evoke a range of different scenes, including a siege or tournament. Tents are associated with a number of diverse scenarios, ranging from their use as military equipment to the way in which they can act as a setting for a romantic meeting between knight and lady. One line of enquiry will be concerned with whether there are divisions along gender lines in different types of pavilion-usage. Regardless of who uses and owns the tents and pavilions, however, I believe that they are a fascinating device and enable people to interact with their surroundings in an unusual way. I hope to demonstrate that the act of pitching a pavilion has the potential to be confrontational, empowering, seductive or merely practical, depending on the circumstances. The deceptively simple canvas structure can attain a surprising level of complexity of meaning and symbolism. It can moreover be a flamboyant statement of power or wealth, but nonetheless remains a highly vulnerable and easily-accessed form of shelter, offering little protection from one's enemies.

Chapter Four concludes the study with a close reading of just two texts, the French *Le Bel Inconnu* and the Middle English *Partonope of Blois*, and aims to look specifically at the way in which narrative structure interacts with the central locations. In the two romances under consideration, these locations are unusual because they are urban. Unlike horses, ships and tents, cities only infrequently play a role of any great importance in romance. While they may often feature as the target of a siege, in which the city is objectified so that it is something that an army seeks to destroy or capture, they hardly ever function as a setting for other kinds of narrative action. It is only rarely that romance protagonists spend any significant length of time, or that the plot is moved forward, within the city walls. The chapter consequently asks the question how, and indeed whether, cities work as romance settings by using these two exceptional texts as case studies, and asks why towns and cities do not feature more frequently in the corpus. I do not intend to concentrate so much upon the actual descriptive passages as to analyse the way in which the city is depicted throughout the narrative, in terms of its

role and relationship to the text's protagonists. Women are of particular significance in both *Le Bel Inconnu* and *Partonope*, because of their close bonds with the towns or cities that they rule. I will therefore consider whether urban space is typically gendered female, and is therefore antithetical to the questing male hero. Issues of mobility arise, with the women of the romances very much stuck in their urban surroundings, and I will examine how, and whether, the knight errant is able to occupy such immobile space.

While a large number of the scenarios in which horses, ships, tents and cities appear are fantastic, I do adopt a historical approach where relevant. The literary works of romance authors had considerable influence upon real life, as the elite sought to bring to life the idealised events of romance, and perhaps also vice-versa as chronicles may have inspired certain episodes in romance. Often, for example, leaders throughout Europe would deliberately imitate the set-pieces of romance by commissioning spectacular pavilions as part of the backdrop for their tournaments and wedding festivities.[3]

Literature far exceeds reality, however, in terms of its marvellous settings. All four subjects covered in this thesis frequently attract the hyperbolic description that is so characteristic of the genre and is applied to everything from places to people. The narrator of the thirteenth-century *Yder* proposes an ironic critique of this style of writing, castigating it as follows:

> Plusors dc troveors se penerent
> Des estoires qu'il mesmenerent
> De feire unes descripcions
> De vergiez e de paveillons
> E de el, si que tuit s'aparceivent
> Qu'il en dient plus qu'il ne dcivent.
> Par cel quident lor traitez peindre,
> Mes nel font, car nuls n'i deit feindre;
> O bien estoire o bien mençonge,
> Tel dit n'a fors savor de songe;
> Tant en acressent les paroles,
> Mes jo n'ai cure d'iparboles.
> Yparbole est chose non voire
> Qui ne fu e ne que n'est a croire;
> Ço en est la difinicion.[4]

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[3] For further information see below, Chapter Three.

[4] *The Romance of Yder*, ed. and trans. by Alison Adams (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983), ll. 4444-58.

> [Many *trouveurs* tried in the stories they distorted to give descriptions of orchards and tents and other things of a kind which made everyone realize that they were saying more than they ought to. They thought they were adorning their tales but they were not, for no writer should deceive; whether true or false, a story like that seems as if it were no more than a dream; however much the words may gain by it, I have no interest in hyperbole. Hyperbole is something untrue which never was and is not to be believed; that is the definition.]

The irony arises from the fact that this passage follows immediately after a fairly lengthy description of a rather grand tent (ll. 4425-43), which the narrator then concludes by saying:

> Mes tant di de cest pavilon
> Qu'il n'en a nuls soz ciel quil vaille;
> Mult en fu riche la ventaille. (4459-61)

> [But I can tell you such things about that tent that there was none on earth the equal of it; the flap too was very fine.]

The reader will find references to numerous horses, ships, pavilions and cities in the following pages, all staking a claim to be the finest in the world. Although the cumulative effect of so much exaggerated description could be to weaken its impact, I hope to demonstrate that such elements are not only beautiful but also versatile details in the landscape of romance, no less fine than the other (perhaps more common or more commented upon) idealised topoi, and of equal structural importance.

Chapter One: Horses

The horse is an indispensable attribute of a knight, and the importance of the animal's contribution to its rider's status and role is clear to see in the depictions of the knight-hero of medieval romance. It is an inescapable fact that a knight needs a horse, and not merely for the practical reasons of transportation and to enable him to joust or fight in wars. As Denis Hue remarks, 'A cheval, l'homme domine le monde, prend physiquement et socialement une hauteur nouvelle'.[5] Being elevated from the ground has a significant impact on an individual's relationship with those beneath him/her. Salisbury concurs, declaring that 'A nobleman was set apart and above commoners by the horse beneath him'.[6] That people in the Middle Ages also believed this to be true is clear from the writings of Jordanus Ruffus:

> No animal is more noble than the horse, since it is by horses that princes, magnates and knights are separated from lesser people and because a lord cannot fittingly be seen among private citizens except through the mediation of a horse.[7]

Jordanus was a knight-farrier of Emperor Frederick II and wrote his *De medicina equorum* ('On the Medicine of Horses') around 1250-6. His words imply that a horse is more than an accessory for the aristocracy, since it is essential for the protection and display of their status. In monuments too, the horse often serves in the same way as an indication of high social rank while also, as Kinney points out, suggesting the heroism and grandeur of the rider.[8]

Literary knights are of course in a different category from medieval lords, yet share some of the same concerns. A knight is most often seen on horseback not only to elevate him above the common people, but also because the horse is part of his very identity. The French word *chevalier* even includes the animal in the designation for the

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[5] Denis Hue, 'L'Orgueil du cheval', in *Le Cheval dans le monde médiéval* (*Sénéfiance*, 32) (Aix-en-Provence: CUER MA, 1992), pp. 259-76 (p. 259).

[6] Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 28. Hence the expression to ride on a 'high horse' which has, from medieval times, connoted pride or ostentation.

[7] Quoted in R.H.C. Davis, *The Medieval Warhorse: Origin, Development and Redevelopment* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), pp. 107-8.

[8] See Dale Kinney, 'The Horse, the King and the Cuckoo: Medieval Narrations of the Statue of Marcus Aurelius', *Word and Image*, 18 (2002), 372-98 (p. 381).

man. The knight, however, is essentially a contradiction: although portrayed almost always as belonging to the upper echelons of society, he is available as entertainment to a much wider audience. Riddy interestingly proposes that the literary figure can act as an escapist dream:

> Once established in the course of the thirteenth century as a social identity, the knight became available – like the cowboy in our own day – for myth. As myth, he is a ubiquitous signifier of male autonomy and power, a focus for the fantasies of people who are not themselves members of the knightly class, just as cowboys are part of the imaginative lives of people who have never ridden a horse.[9]

In literature, therefore, the horse not only sets the rider apart from those around him on the ground, but simultaneously draws him nearer to his audience because the animal inherently symbolises popular ideals of travel and adventure. Knight and cowboy are both easy figures to recognise and their respective identities are signalled by the presence of a horse.

The rise of the horse in Western Europe has been linked with the increasingly important role played in battle by the mounted warrior. Lynn White is the most famous proponent of the well-known argument that the arrival of stirrups in Western Europe (which he dates to the early eighth century and the time of Charles Martel) caused a fundamental change in the types of weapons used, and hence had a dramatic effect on the way in which battles were fought.[10] The most significant of the new arms is said to be the lance, which a rider could only wield successfully with the increased stability and balance afforded him by the use of stirrups. More recently, however, Stephen Morillo has made a strong case against this widely-accepted viewpoint, by contending that, although the stirrup may well have appeared in Europe between around 500 and 1000, it does not explain the ascent of cavalry over infantry during the medieval period.[11] Even

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[9] Felicity Riddy, 'Middle English Romance: Family, Marriage, Intimacy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. by Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 235-52 (p. 238).

[10] See Lynn White, Jr, *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 1-38.

[11] Morillo argues that a cavalry charge against a body of foot-soldiers would only have served as a psychological weapon. Well-organised infantry who stayed close together and did not break ranks in the face of the frightening prospect of the charging cavalry would cause the horses to refuse in the face of the huge, impassable obstacle ahead of them. Generally, a charge would be held up short of a mass collision.

Morillo does accept, though, that there was a 'relative increase in the importance of cavalry in deciding battles' even if the traditional picture of the mounted knight jousting on the battlefield is not something that would in reality have dominated medieval warfare.[12] In any case, battles were by no means the only method of warfare practised by medieval troops. Cavalry was less effective in siege situations than foot soldiers and was equally of little use on rough terrain, such as the Scottish highlands, or on campaign in lands that afforded insufficient forage for the horses. Despite this and the fact that by the early thirteenth century warfare tactics were changing so as to make the mounted knight of even less importance, the association of the knight with his warhorse was embedded in medieval culture and persists in the literature of the day.[13]

Although he would be paid for military service, a knight had to provide his own equipment, including his horse (and usually some spares in case it was injured or killed), and so it was only the nobility who could afford to take up the role of cavalryman. Keen observes that

> pay in these conditions was rather more like a return (quite a handsome return) on an investment than wages in the modern sense. The social esteem in which nobles and knights were held on account of their readiness to serve was another part of the return on the same investment.[14]

Given the perceived pre-eminence of the warrior on horseback, it is unsurprising that the mounted knight is the hero of medieval romance. In this chapter, I wish to look more closely at the role of horses in Middle English and French romance. As an introduction to the subject, I will provide a survey of the different types of horse used in

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If the infantry scattered, then the superior mobility and height of the horseman would give him the advantage, regardless of whether he had stirrups or not and the kind of weapon he was carrying. Morillo therefore argues that cavalry was not better in this period but that infantry was worse, as poor leadership led to a lack of trust and a greater likelihood that men would break ranks. See Stephen Morillo, 'The "Age of Cavalry" Revisited', in *The Circle of War in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Donald J. Kagay and L.J. Andrew Villalon (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999), pp. 45-58.

[12] Morillo, 'The "Age of Cavalry" Revisited', p. 47.

[13] On the changing military strategy, see Andrew Ayton, *Knights and Warhorses: Military Service and the English Aristocracy under Edward III* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1994), pp. 18-31. He notes that 'the militarily active among the nobility and gentry seem quickly to have accepted the requirements of the tactical revolution and a clear distinction emerged between deeds of chivalry, which were most appropriately performed on horseback amongst their peers - on the tournament field and, on campaign, in individual combats and small-scale encounters - and the practical business of battlefield fighting which was most effectively done on foot in disciplined tactical formations, often in association with archers' (p. 20).

[14] Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 225.

the Middle Ages and the various medieval terms applied to them. Building upon this, my discussion thereafter widens to examine the level of description of horses in such texts.

When considering the depiction of the horse in romance, it is essential to realise the influence of the wealth of historic associations and symbolic values pertaining to it. Medieval writers inherited a considerable number of horse-related literary precedents. Among the most famous are the mythical centaurs – half-man, half-horse – and the legendary Pegasus, the winged horse of Perseus, yet the medieval imagination did not tend to develop these particular myths. The classical period offers other striking images of horses, including those that draw the chariot of Apollo, the sun god, and thereby herald dawn and dusk. By contrast, the Book of Revelation tells of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse and medieval writers would have been very aware of their significance as harbingers of war, famine, disease and death.[15] Perhaps the most famous literary horse, however, for the medieval audience is the wooden one that led to the downfall of Troy.

The horse can evidently suggest a number of different, and sometimes contradictory, qualities. Of the examples cited above, however, only the Trojan horse and perhaps the ominous associations of the horses of the Apocalypse have noticeably influenced Middle English and Old French romances. We will see this below in more detailed discussions of horses as gifts and the topos of the black horse, which usually signifies evil. Although medieval writers must have been very aware of the long literary tradition of mythical horses, and equally conscious of the stereotyped characteristics of the horse acknowledged by writers of their own day, romances and epics treat them in a specific and rather selective way. The writers of medieval fiction choose to make few references to any negative associations of the horse and instead fully embrace the idea of it being a noble companion to man.

By selecting several texts or legends as case studies for more detailed analysis, I hope to make clear the characteristic ways in which horses are treated in medieval

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[15] Revelation 6. 1-8. For discussion of the four horsemen, see Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Religion, War, Famine and Death in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

romance. Interestingly, there are relatively few magical horses, although a significant number do have quite extraordinary powers, and I focus upon these exceptional mounts in the second section of this chapter. In such cases, the horse becomes anthropomorphised and sometimes develops a role as a romance character in its own right. The topos of the loyal horse, who refuses to serve any but his true master, is famously exemplified in the legend of Alexander and Bucephalas, a story that retained its popularity in the Middle Ages and may well have influenced the characterisation of some later romance horses.

More often, however, in romance the horse is important less for its own sake and more for its role as an appendage to the rider. As we shall see below, the mount that an individual chooses to ride, and the manner in which s/he treats it, can reveal a great deal about the rider's character and status. Consequently, my third section considers the linking of the identity of the rider with that of his/her horse, a literary technique that is familiar to both romance and epic (although perhaps more common in later medieval works).

Finally, I focus upon romance episodes in which horses feature as gifts or rewards and discuss the way in which the act of gift-giving tends to reveal details of the relationship between donor and recipient. In particular, I focus upon the horse as a love-token and propose the idea that a recurring triangle is formed in many romances, consisting of knight, lady and horse.

Description of horses

There are a number of different words for horses in the medieval vocabulary, most of which classify the animals according to their use and quality. At the most prestigious end of the scale is the knight's warhorse, the destrier (*destrer/desterer* in Middle English). Destriers, the largest of horses, were status symbols reserved only for the highest aristocracy. Most Edwardian men-at-arms would have used heavy hunters instead, since these combined a degree of strength with better mobility than the bigger animals.[16] The Middle English word *stede* also usually refers to a knight's mount, but is

[16] See Ayton, *Knights and Warhorses*, p. 23-4.

sometimes applied more generally to a riding horse. Less expensive than the destrier, but still an animal of high quality, is the courser, a large and swift type of horse that was favoured for hunting although occasionally also used in warfare. The palfrey meanwhile is of roughly equal value to the courser, and has a pacing gait that makes it the most comfortable, and therefore most highly prized, riding horse. Palfreys appear frequently in romances, used by both men and women for travelling, and it is not uncommon for a knight to use a palfrey as he moves between adventures, exchanging it for his charger when there is the prospect of combat.

In Middle English, there are also less specific equine words, including *hors* and *fole*. The latter can sometimes designate a young horse but is more frequently used as a poetic word for any kind of horse, and is particularly common in alliterative poetry.[17] *Blonk* and *capel* (again, both are non-specific words meaning horse) are similarly found predominantly in alliterative sources, and would have been used 'to satisfy a metrical need'.[18] While the destrier and palfrey are by far the most commonly occurring types of horse in both English and French romances, there are in addition a range of horses of lower status mentioned from time to time.[19] Davis provides some interesting comparative figures that serve to highlight the width of the gap between lower and upper classes in terms of the horses each could afford: 'a cheapish riding horse would cost 24 times as much as a peasant workhorse, a good palfrey 400 times as much, and a good warhorse 800 times as much'.[20] The cheaper horses include the *rouncy* – which was either an agricultural horse or one used by non-knightly soldiers – and the hobby, an even less expensive mount often used as transport to the battlefield by light infantry. Amblers are riding horses of lower quality than palfreys, while hackney tends to denote an ordinary horse (often let for hire). There are as well farm-horses primarily used for

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[17] See Marie Borroff, *'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'. A Stylistic and Metrical Study* (London: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 76.
[18] Thorlac Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1977), p. 83. Although the *MED* suggests that *blonk* was in everyday usage, Turville-Petre convincingly argues that it was in fact a specifically alliterative word; see p. 82, n. 19.
[19] A useful overview of the Old French terminology used for the various types of horse can be found in Marie-France de Genellis, *Le Cheval dans l'histoire* (Paris: Peyronnet, 1956), pp. 89-90.
[20] Davis, *The Medieval Warhorse*, p. 67.

ploughing, such as the *stot* (which was also a disparaging term for a woman), the *sompter hors* (packhorse) and the *jade* (carthorse or hack).

Several critics have produced interesting studies on the equine terminology and description used in Old French literature, inspired by the seminal article on the subject by Jean Frappier.[21] Surveying the *chansons de geste* from the end of the eleventh century to the middle of the thirteenth century, Frappier found that the language used to denote and to describe a warhorse changes. In the three earliest poems selected by Frappier, *cheval* is used most often to designate a warhorse, but in later works the term *destrier* becomes more common.[22] Frappier further notes that the use of a colour adjective as a horse's name increases in later *chansons*, while the number of epithets applied is also much higher. He comments that 'Les destriers se trouvent de plus en plus caparaçonnés d'épithètes, surtout géographiques et de couleur'.[23] Attempting to explain this phenomenon, Frappier suggests that there is less diversity in the vocabulary of the earlier *chansons*, perhaps because they were designed largely to be recited and were therefore more pared down so as to be easily remembered.[24] Frappier's conclusion is that all the epithets refer either to praise or ornamentation:

> Elles vantent leur valeur, leur rapidité à la course, la qualité de leur race, la beauté de leur robe. Elles contribuent ainsi à l'idéalisation épique, à l'image d'une supériorité où les exploits des héros prennent tout leur relief.[25]

The splendid horses therefore make a similar contribution to the epic as the treasured swords (which are also often named) and fine armour: all these objects act as accoutrements to the riders and reflect glory and status upon them.

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[21] Jean Frappier, 'Les Destriers et leurs épithètes', in *La Technique littéraire des chansons de geste: actes du colloque de Liège (septembre 1957)* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1959), pp. 85-104. Critics who have used Frappier's article as a foundation for their own studies include Nigel Nixon, 'Quelques remarques sur la tradition rolandienne à la lumière d'une étude stylistique de certaines formules contentant "cheval" ou l'un de ses synonymes', in *Stylistique, rhétorique et poétique dans les langues romanes*, ed. by Jean-Claude Bouvier (Aix en Provence: Université de Provence, 1986), pp. 369-82; and Roger M. Walker and Milija N. Pavlović, 'War Horses and Their Epithets in the *Poema de Mio Cid* and French Epic: Some Observations and Tentative Conclusions', *Neophilologus*, 75 (1991), 76-85.

[22] See Frappier, 'Les Destriers', p. 87.

[23] Frappier, 'Les Destriers', p. 99.

[24] Frappier, 'Les Destriers', p. 102.

[25] Frappier, 'Les Destriers', p. 94.

The *chansons de geste* contain a multitude of horses. In the *Chanson de Roland*, which dates from around 1100, the narrator names the horses of the main characters plus some of the Moslem steeds. As Davis observes, the names are usually descriptive and include Sorel (bright chestnut), Passecerf (overtake deer), Tachebrun (brown spot), Veillantif (valiant) and Tencendur (ash-grey).[26] Naming of horses is far less common in romances; in Arthurian legend Gawain's famous steed, Gringalet, is one of very few exceptions and will be discussed in more detail below. Even Arthur himself does not have a named horse and Gawain is the one character whom we see consistently riding the same, named horse.[27] Elsewhere, horses are only occasionally named, as with Blaunchard in *Sir Launfal*, whose name clearly derives from his white colouring.[28] Bayard, a common name for epic horses of a bay colour, still appears in later texts, but in English it increasingly attracts a pejorative association with blindness or folly, and the expression 'as blind as Bayard' became proverbial.[29]

As names such as Blaunchard and Bayard suggest, the importance of colour in the description of a horse remains a constant in both epic and romance and this preoccupation, as we might expect, reflects real-life preferences. In general, grey and white horses were the most sought-after colours, while bay, sorrel and duns were also popular. Chestnut and black tended to be less well-liked.[30] Part of the reason for the contrasting levels of popularity for white and black horses lies in the two colours' age-

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[26] Davis, *The Medieval Warhorse*, pp. 58-9.

[27] Arthur does, however, have a named horse (a mare called Llamrei, meaning 'Swift-Paced') in *Culhwch and Olwen*, one of eleven medieval Welsh prose tales that collectively form the *Mabinogion*. It is the only tale of the *Mabinogion* to refer to horses' names. Although it seems surprising that Arthur's horse is a mare (stallions were the usual mount for a knight), Davies suggests that 'perhaps one should bear in mind the fact that sovereignty among the Celts was often perceived as both equine and feminine': Sioned Davies, 'Horses in the *Mabinogion*', in *The Horse in Celtic Culture: Medieval Welsh Perspectives*, ed. by Davies and Nerys Ann Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 121-40 (p. 129).

[28] Thomas Chestre, *Sir Launfal*, ed. by A.J. Bliss (London and Edinburgh: Nelson, 1960). Gower similarly mentions Grisel as a horse name in the *Confessio Amantis*; *The English Works of John Gower*, ed. by G.C. Macaulay, EETS ES 81-2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1901; repr. 1957), Book VIII, l. 2407.

[29] Sandra Billington notes that no such degeneration of the name occurs in French; see 'The *Cheval fol* of Lyon and Other Asses', in *Fools and Folly*, ed. by Clifford Davidson, (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1996), pp. 9-33 (p. 10). As an example of the association of Bayard with blindness in Middle English, see Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), I, 218. All references to Chaucer's works are to this edition. For a discussion of the Bayard reference and the history of the name, see J.D. Burnley, 'Proude Bayard: *Troilus and Criseyde*, l. 218', *Notes and Queries*, 221 (1976), 148-52.

[30] See Teresa McLean, *The English at Play in the Middle Ages* (Windsor Forest: The Kensal Press, 1983), p. 34.

old significance as symbols of good and evil. This is often exploited in depictions of literary horses and the image of the black horse is especially popular with Christian writers. Caesarius of Heisterbach, for example, uses it in his *Dialogue on Miracles*, intended to instruct novices in the early thirteenth century. He tells of Gottschalk, a usurer who lies and mocks God and Christians until one night the devil comes for him:

> Standing there were two coal-black horses, and by them a mis-shapen attendant of the same coal-black hue, who cried to the peasant: 'Quick! Mount this horse; it has been brought for you.'[31]

The horse itself is a devil, according to Caesarius, and bears Gottschalk off to see many dead people, suffering for their misdeeds, and the burning chair that is destined to be his.

The thirteenth-century *Queste del Saint Graal* provides another good example of the use of the black-horse topos, working it into a literary narrative and using it not only to create drama but also to serve a didactic purpose. In the *Queste*, Perceval is successfully tempted by a devilish woman who offers him her magnificent black horse.[32] Malory's retelling of the episode in the *Morte Darthur* is closely based on the Old French *Queste*, but does deviate from its source in not explicitly revealing to the reader that the woman is a fiend before Perceval climbs upon her horse. In so doing Malory increases the suspense, although the hints of evil are far from obscure:

> Whan sir Percyvale behylde that horse he mervaylde that he was so grete and so well apparayled. And natforthan he was so hardy he lepte uppon hym and toke none hede off hymselff.[33]

The remarkable size of the animal, along with its black colouring, should have been sufficient warning signs for Perceval to act with caution, but are not strong enough to overcome his desire for the horse. As soon as Perceval mounts, it transpires that the beast has supernatural properties:

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[31] Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, trans. by H. von E. Scott and C. C. Swinton Bland, with an introduction by G. G. Coulton, 2 vols (London: Routledge, 1929), I, 77.
[32] *La Queste del Saint Graal: roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. by Albert Pauphilet, CFMA 33 (Paris: Champion, 1923), pp. 91-2.
[33] *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory* (hereafter, *Malory*), ed. by Eugène Vinaver, 3rd edn, rev. by P.J.C. Field, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), II, 911.

> within an owre and lasse he bare hym foure dayes journey thense untyll he com to a rowghe watir whych rored, and that horse wolde have borne hym into hit.[34]

Perceval realises the danger just in time and saves himself by making the sign of the cross. The horse throws him off and plunges into the water, at which point Perceval recognises that it is in fact a fiend.

The episode of the black horse is clearly intended to show Perceval guilty of rash behaviour and poor judgement that could have led him into mortal peril. This is despite the fact that the vital importance of a good horse to a knight is wholeheartedly accepted as a given, both in the rest of Malory's work and in romance in general. It is unsurprising that Perceval is so easily tempted, since a horse is one of the most precious worldly items that a knight can possess. Previous to this incident, the hero has lost two horses in quick succession when each one was slain as he fought with an opponent. Perceval's lack of a horse unmans him, in the sense that it leaves him powerless, upon two separate occasions, to pursue his attackers. Interestingly, the black-horse episode is positioned in the narrative just before Perceval nearly succumbs to another temptation when he is seduced by a woman (again, she is actually a fiend) in her pavilion. The juxtaposition of the two temptation scenes underlines the parity between the two tests: desire for a horse can be as potentially damaging for a Christian knight as sexual desire. Perceval is placed in two deliberately frustrating situations and the temptation is therefore to reassert himself – in one case as a knight, by regaining a horse, in the other as a man, through sexual action.

The colour black is so synonymous with evil that the convention can be both suggested and frustrated in *Partonope of Blois* (a mid-fifteenth-century translation of the twelfth-century French *Partonopeus de Blois*). On the young hero's first morning at Chef d'Oire, Partonope gazes round and notices a fine courser in the place where he had left his own weary horse the previous evening:

> He sawe where stode, wyth-owten dowte,
> A Corser þat was bothe fayre and able
> For any kynge, þat streyghte owte of þe stabelle

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[34] *Malory*, II, 912.

Was broghte for he shulde on hym ryde.
He was a-ferde hym for to be-stryde,
Or for to lepe vppon hys backe,
Be-cause þat he was so blacke.
Some euelle thynge he wende hyt had be ... .[35]

In this romance, the hero's apprehension is gently mocked since the horse turns out to be a perfectly mundane animal, albeit a very good quality one. Much later in the tale, the black-horse motif subtly reappears when Partonope is promised equipment so that he can compete in the tournament to win his beloved Melior's hand. Urake tells him:

A stede I shall gyve you which is cole blak;
In hym I trowe ye shall fynde no lak,
Wele rennyng and redy atte honde,
A better shall be founde in no londe.[36]

The first black horse was a gift to Partonope from Melior, while the second is from her sister, Urake. In the second instance, the black colour of the animal bears no sinister overtones but merely serves to underline the close thematic connection between the two sisters, both of whom hide Partonope away from the world for a period of time. Indeed, the black horse could very well be the same animal in each case.

Black and white are not always charged with deeper meaning and are often used as alternative colours for a knight who wishes to disguise his appearance at a tournament by appearing with arms, trappings and horse all of one colour. The eponymous hero of *Ipomadon* is not unusual in choosing to appear for a three-day tournament first in white, then red and finally black.[37] These are practical colours, each of which could realistically be matched with a horse's coat, even the red which could be interpreted as sorrel.[38] It is only very rarely that other, more outlandish, colours of horses are invented by medieval writers, as is famously the case with the green horse of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Elsewhere, there is a more unnatural shade of red horse in *Sir Eglamour*, described as the colour of rowan tree berries. The striking

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[35] *The Middle English Versions of Partonope of Blois*, ed. by A. Trampe Bödtker, EETS ES 109 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1912; repr. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), ll. 2002-9.
[36] *Partonope of Blois*, ll. 8313-6.
[37] See *Ipomadon*, ed. by Rhiannon Purdie, EETS 316 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), ll. 3060-4187.
[38] Cf. the red knight, Sir Gray-steele, who rides a sorrel horse in *Eger and Grime*, in *Middle English Metrical Romances*, ed. by Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale, 2 vols (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), II, 669-717; ll. 116-17.

appearance of this red animal is reflected in its magical qualities. Eglamour receives it as a gift from King Edmund, who tells him that

> In iustenyng ne in turnament
> Thow schalt suffre no dethes dent
> Why þou fy3tys hym on.[39]

Magical or supernatural horses tend to have unusual colouring, which clearly signals their alterity, but they only appear in very limited numbers in medieval English and French romance. By contrast, though, Enide's bizarrely coloured horse in Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec et Enide* is not endowed with any exceptional properties.[40] The horse is a gift from Guivret and its head is black on one side, white on the other, with a green stripe down the middle. Chrétien may well have been inspired by a Celtic source, in which such an animal would have had supernatural origins, but he seems to use it as a purely decorative touch in his own romance.[41]

The horse evidently has a fundamental role to play in any tale involving a knight, but I believe that its importance diminishes as romance develops, particularly in England where it often seems taken for granted. It is rare for more than one or two horses to be named or described in later Middle English romances, in sharp contrast with the keen interest shown in detailing the breed, appearance and fine qualities of as many horses as possible in the *chansons de geste* or some of the *romans antiques* (particularly *Le Roman de Thèbes*).[42] This can of course be partly attributed to the development in subject matter; while the epic often deals with large-scale pitched battles on horseback, the romance is usually more interested in individual combat and is

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[39] *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, ed. by Frances E. Richardson, EETS 256 (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), Cotton MS, ll. 613-15.

[40] Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, ed. and trans. by Carleton W. Carroll with an introduction by William W. Kibler (London: Garland, 1987), ll. 5270-83.

[41] Joseph J. Duggan observes merely that it is 'typical of strangely colored Otherworld horses', in *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 61. Hill, however, argues that the colouring is significant because, according to Salernitan thinking, green is the most beautiful colour being considered halfway between the two extremes of black and white. He therefore believes that the horse's colouring represents 'mediation between conflicting demands', which is also 'one of the central thematic concerns of this romance': Thomas D. Hill, 'Enide's Colored Horse and Salernitan Color Theory: *Erec et Enide*, lines 5268-81', *Romania*, 108:4 (1987), 523-7 (p. 526).

[42] *Le Roman de Thèbes*, ed. by Léopold Constans, 2 vols (Paris: Didot, 1890).

most likely to focus on just one or two heroes. Yet this is not sufficient to explain the difference in attitude.

In many Middle English romances, horses – even good ones – are much less well regarded than in their Old French counterparts and predecessors. At times, this is merely expressed as an apparent lack of interest in horses per se, as in the Middle English *Sir Ferumbras* (c. 1380) which is based on a late twelfth-century French *chanson de geste*. In this tale, Richard of Normandy rides out to seek help for the besieged French and is pursued by the Saracen, King Claryon, on his exceptionally fast Arabian horse.[43] The French *Fierabras* contains a lengthy description of the qualities of this magnificent horse, while the Middle English text contains some basic details but shortens the account considerably.[44] This stance is quite typical of Middle English romance: there is generally little description of horses, and what description there is is extremely brief.

Certain horses do develop a larger role, forming a partnership with their riders and consequently featuring prominently in the action of the tale. I will look at these more sentimental attitudes to horses in detail below, but in Middle English romance the prevailing attitude seems to be that a horse is a commodity. This is not to say that the horse plays a less important role in romance than epic, but that in romances individual animals are only occasionally developed to the same degree as the horses of the *chansons de geste*. For many writers, it is clearly the monetary value of a horse that is its most significant element. Gouiran believes that a knight would not have placed greater importance on his steed than on his other items of equipment and, indeed, that swords were more likely to be treasured than horses since they were longer-lasting.[45]

Although valuable, a good horse is replaceable, and this is the attitude illustrated by the late fourteenth-century *Athelston*. In this romance, the archbishop of Canterbury rushes to Westminster to intercede when he hears that his sworn brother has been

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[43] Arabian horses were highly valued in Western Europe since their discovery by the Franks in the eighth century. See Davis, *The Medieval Warhorse*, p. 51.
[44] Compare *Sir Ferumbras*, ed. by Sidney J. Herrtage, EETS ES 34 (London: Trübner, 1879), ll. 3639-42 and 3657-66, with *Fierabras*, ed. by Marc le Person, CFMA 142 (Paris: Champion, 2003), ll. 4245-66.
[45] Gérard Gouiran, 'Entre Sarrasins et Chrétiens, ou le cheval décapité', in *Le Cheval dans le monde médiéval*, pp. 239-55.

falsely accused and is threatened with imminent death. In order to achieve the greatest speed possible, the archbishop changes horses nine times in the course of his journey. By contrast, the messenger who was sent to fetch him has the use of only one animal, and his mount finally drops down dead from exhaustion on London Bridge. The messenger is very distressed by this misfortune:

> 'Allas,' he sayde, 'þat I was born!
> Now is my goode hors forlorn,
> Was good at ylke a nede;
> 3istyrday vpon þe grounde,
> He was wurþ an hundryd pounde,
> Ony kyng to lede.'[46]

The archbishop, though, reproves him for getting his priorities wrong; he argues that the loss of the horse is unimportant if they can save the innocent man. He soon comforts the messenger in any case by promising him a good reward once they complete their mission. The loss of the horse is an inconvenience but ultimately is merely a financial loss, for which the messenger can easily be compensated by the wealthy archbishop.

A similarly unsentimental approach is taken by Philippe de Mézières (c. 1327-1405) in his *De la chevalerie de la passion du Jhesu Crist.* He recommends taking the minimum number of horses when travelling on crusade because, through God's grace, Christian knights will be able to capture a plentiful supply from their enemies.[47] Williamson remarks that Philippe writes of horses 'as if they were inanimate tools or instruments', and this is certainly not an uncommon way of thinking.[48] In the context of a tournament, participants' horses are often viewed first and foremost as potential booty. While in literature the hero generally captures his opponents' horses only to present them – in a typically romantic gesture – as a gift to his lord or lady, the reality was somewhat different. The poetic account of the life of William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke, who lived from about 1145 to 1219, provides us with a fascinating picture of the way in which fortunes could be made on the tournament ground. *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal* tells that in the early days of his career, William is far from

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[46] *Athelston*, ed. by A. McI. Trounce, EETS 224 (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), ll. 387-92.
[47] See Joan B. Williamson, 'The Image of the Horse in the Work of Philippe de Mézières', *Reinardus*, 5 (1992), 217-29 (p. 219).
[48] Williamson, 'The Image of the Horse', p. 220.

affluent and struggles even to afford a *roncin* (equivalent to the Middle English *rouncy*).

A tournament, however, leads to a dramatic upturn in his fortunes:

> Hui esteit li Mareschals
> Povre d'aveir e de chivals,
> Ore en a il quatre e demi,
> Boens e beaus, Damnedé merci!
> Si a roncins e palefreis
> E boens sumers e bel herneis.
>
> [Only that day had the Marshal been
> a poor man as regards possessions and horses,
> and now he had four and a half,
> fine mounts and handsome, thanks to God!
> He also had hacks and palfreys,
> fine pack-horses and harnesses.][49]

Although the poet tries to stress throughout his work the romance ideal that honour won in a tournament is worth far more than any material gain, it is difficult to be entirely convinced on this point. The monetary value of horses acquired through feats of arms seems to be of vital importance to the young William at the start of his career, particularly given the importance of having sufficient means to give generously to his followers.

Elsewhere, the numbers of horses won in battle can have a different signification. Gwara notes of the epic *Poema de Mio Cid* that 'the horse signals victory, the poet taking pains to rate the success of battle in terms of equine loot.'[50] When the Cid eventually routs the king of Morocco and his forces, the spoils include 1500 thoroughbreds and he can reward all his foot soldiers with a horse, 'an act which symbolically elevates the stature of each member of the Cid's company and reemphasizes the hero's martial successes'.[51] The practicality of whether a leader would actually want all his foot soldiers suddenly transformed into cavalry is irrelevant; it is a resoundingly symbolic gesture that affirms the Cid's domination over his enemies. The mass of captured horses is more a show of power and glory than a display

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[49] Text and translation are from *History of William Marshal. Volume I: Text and Translation (ll. 1-10031)*, ed. by A.J. Holden, trans. by S. Gregory and historical notes by D. Crouch (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, Birkbeck College, 2002), ll. 1367-72.
[50] Joseph J. Gwara, Jr., 'Equine Imagery in the *Poema de Mio Cid*', *La Corónica*, 12 (1983), 9-20 (p. 11).
[51] Gwara, 'Equine Imagery', p. 12.

of wealth, although financial reward is clearly a secondary advantage to military success.

Conversely, poor quality horses also feature regularly in romances, in the motif of the good knight who wins despite the lamentable condition of his mount.[52] Although, as we have seen above, the horse is very necessary to a knight, some texts go further than others to underline the fact that the disadvantage of having to ride an old nag is something that can be overcome. Evidently, this story motif is designed to highlight the worth of the hero and the fact that he succeeds solely because of his ability and not because of advantages such as good equipment. Isumbras epitomises the ideal when he returns to knightly action after spending seven years as a blacksmith:

> In hys armes that he hadde wrought
> On hors that coles hadde ibrought
> To batayle faste he hyde.[53]

Despite his home-made equipment and unsuitable workhorse, Isumbras demonstrates his innate talent in the ensuing battle. His 'sory horse' (l. 429) is in fact slain but he wins a better one to replace it. Isumbras's long period of penance continues, however, as he takes on the role of a palmer for seven years. At the end of this time he is forgiven by God and is taken in by a rich queen (who turns out to be his long-lost wife). The motif is repeated as above when a tournament is called: Isumbras is given a 'sory stede / And yit he conqueryd alle' (ll. 599-600). In both instances, Isumbras requires some kind of horse in order to perform his impressive deeds, but the low quality of his steed in each case serves to emphasise his prowess even further.

Huon of Burdeux also uses the theme of a poor horse to underline the superiority of its hero.[54] King Ivoryn deliberately equips Huon with a dreadful horse, thinking that

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[52] As an example, see *Jaufré. Roman Arthurien du XIII^e siècle en vers provençaux*, ed. by Clovis Brunel, SATF, 2 vols (Paris: Picard, 1943), ll. 9058-81.

[53] *Sir Isumbras* in *Four Middle English Romances: Sir Isumbras, Octavian, Sir Eglamour of Artois, Sir Tryamour*, ed. by Harriet Hudson (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1996), ll. 409-11.

[54] *Huon of Burdeux* was translated into English by Lord Berners and first published c. 1534. The translation is very faithful to a French prose version of 1455 which in turn was based on a thirteenth century *chanson de geste*, followed by three thirteenth-century verse continuations (*La Chanson d'Esclaramonde*, *La Chanson de Clarisse et Florent* and *La Chanson de Ide et Olive*) and a fourth sequel of the fourteenth century (*La Roman de Croissant*), which does not survive.

by so doing Huon (whom he does not know well enough to trust) will be unable to flee from the battle. When Huon is the only man brave enough to accept the offer of single combat to settle the argument between the two sides, the inadequacy of his mount is brought into sharp relief. The animal is completely unsuited to the situation: 'for all that euer Huon coude do, his horse wolde not auaunce forth / wherof Huon was so dyspleased ...'.[55] Huon consequently has to take his opponent's blows standing still, but successfully withstands the first strike and then swiftly dispatches the man with just one swing of his sword. After this victory, Huon's first impulse is to seize his dead opponent's horse, Blanchardyn, a magnificent beast that is a complete contrast to his former mount. He cannot resist the temptation to take the animal for a 'test-drive' and show off his skills to the onlooking crowd:

> when he saw hym self on Blanchardyn / he dasshed to hym his sporres to proue hym / when the horse felte the sporres / he began to lepe & gambaud & galop as it had ben the thonder / the paynyms had meruayle that he had not fallen to the erthe / when he had well proued him and turned him in and out / he thought he wolde not gyue hym for the valewe of a realme.[56]

The implication is clearly that Huon is much better suited to this mount than the old hack, but that the calibre of horse is still of far lesser importance than the quality of the knight who fights upon it.

As the passage quoted above from *Huon* clearly demonstrates, though, fine horses are nonetheless still appreciated even when it is recognised that a great knight can perform admirably regardless of the kind of horse he rides. A fine steed complements a good knight and, as we shall see, the condition of a horse often says something about its rider. At the other extreme from the derisory horses of *Isumbras* are the marvellous romance horses which develop a really significant role in relation to their masters. It would be misleading to think that all horses in medieval romance are viewed as commodities since there are a small but significant number of exceptional animals. Partnerships that place great emphasis on the equine partner – like Arondel with Bevis and Bucephalas with Alexander – are rare, but some of the outstanding

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[55] *The Boke of Duke Huon of Burdeux*, ed. by S.L. Lee, EETS ES 40, 41, 43, 50 (London: Trübner, 1882-7), p. 186.
[56] *Huon of Burdeux*, p. 187.

characteristics of these famous steeds perhaps do filter through into other texts. Thus there are smaller details of remarkable equine behaviour in many other romances, such as the common topos of horses that fight each other in imitation of their masters' single combat.

Exceptional horses / Anthropomorphism

Appropriately, given that a knight's primary role is that of a fighter, one of the most common characteristics of an exceptional steed is that it assists its rider in battle. Heroic partnerships of man and horse seem to have been especially popular in the epic tradition and the late twelfth-century *Chanson des quatre fils Aymon* provides a good illustration. In the *Chanson*, Bayard is a fairy horse who plays a large role in helping four brothers rebel against Charlemagne: 'Loin d'être un comparse, Bayard fait partie intégrante de l'esprit de révolte; il le dirige et il le sublime.'[57] It is telling that when Charlemagne finally pardons the brothers, he persists in seeking revenge upon the horse and attempts unsuccessfully to drown it. Bayard really does develop into a character in his own right.

The literary tradition of endowing horses with remarkable – and often human-like – qualities is, as Dubost remarks, an old one:

> Selon Pline l'Ancien, les chevaux ont le sens de la parenté, de l'honneur, de la vengeance et se suicident effectivement quelquefois, soit par désespoir (cheval du roi Nicomède), soit pour se soustraire à l'obligation d'appartenir à un autre (cheval d'Antiochus).[58]

Dubost also points out the interesting similarity between the suicidal horse and the literary topos of the lovers who commit suicide for each other. In the case of lovers, it is generally the man who dies first and then the woman who takes her own life in response, so the horse is playing the female role. We will look again at this connection

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[57] Rita Lejeune, 'Variations sur la fin épique du cheval Bayard', *Travaux de Linguistique et de Litterature*, 16:1 (1978), 323-33 (p. 324).

[58] Francis Dubost, 'De quelques chevaux extraordinaires dans le récit médiéval: esquisse d'une configuration imaginaire', in *Le Cheval dans le monde médiéval*, pp. 189-208 (p. 193). King Nicomedes's horse fasted to death when the king died; Antiochus's horse was captured after the death of its master and killed both itself and its new rider by deliberately galloping over the edge of a cliff.

between horses and women at greater length below, particularly in terms of the relationship that each develops with the knight-hero.

Hagiography too incorporated motifs that show a special bond between master and horse, as in the life of St Columba:

> And as the Saint sat there, a tired old man taking his rest awhile, up runs the white horse, his faithful servitor that used to carry the milk pails, and coming up to the Saint he leaned his head against his breast and began to mourn, knowing as I believe from God Himself – for to God every animal is wise in the instinct his Maker hath given him – that his master was soon to go from him, and that he would see him no more: and his tears ran down as a man's might into the lap of the Saint, and he foamed as he wept.[59]

Bestiaries record similarly human characteristics alongside their more scientific observations on the horse. One thirteenth-century example notes that 'if their master is killed or dies, horses will weep' and that 'many recognise their masters, and become unmanageable if they change hands. Others will suffer no one except their master to ride them ...'.[60] Trevisa's translation of *De proprietatibus rerum*, completed in 1398-9, further helped to perpetuate the popularity and credibility of such equine myths. His text asserts, for instance, that 'som hors suffreþ no man to ryde on his bakke but his owne lord allone, and many hors wepeþ whan his lord is deed.'[61] It is easy to see why these ideas developed into popular romance topoi when we consider how widely they were being circulated as fact throughout the medieval period.

Legend created the epitome of equine loyalty in the form of Alexander the Great's horse, Bucephalas. Several medieval Alexander romances survive, all with their roots ultimately in the Greek romance of Pseudo-Callisthenes, composed by a native of Alexandria some time after 200 BC from a mixture of literary and oral sources.[62] Evidently, the legend had enduring popular appeal and the extant Middle English

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[59] This translation of the *Vita S. Columbae*, written c. 690 by Adamnan, is taken from *Beasts and Saints*, trans. by Helen Waddell (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1934, repr. 1995), p. 44.

[60] *Bestiary, being an English Version of the Bodleian Library, Oxford M.S. Bodley 764*, trans. by Richard Barber (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1993), pp. 102-3. The two manuscripts in which this bestiary appears were written between 1220 and 1250, but the text is based on other, earlier bestiaries, including Isidore of Seville's influential sixth-century *Etymologies*.

[61] *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of 'Bartholomæus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum'*, ed. by M.C. Seymour and others, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), II, 1187.

[62] For a comprehensive survey of the complicated history of recensions, derivatives and translations of the Pseudo-Callisthenes text through to the medieval versions of the Alexander legend, see George Cary, *The Medieval Alexander* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), pp. 9-74.

versions date back to the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries. Bucephalas first appears as a young and very wild colt and it is his reaction to Alexander that signals the hero's great destiny. In *Kyng Alisaunder*, which was composed before 1330, the Macedonian king, Philip, is told by the gods that either Alexander or Philip's own son will rule after him, and that the future leader shall be the one who is bold enough to ride Bucephalas. When the two candidates approach the stable, only Alexander is willing to go near the colt – a fearsome animal that feeds on human flesh – and leap upon it:

> Faste he sat and huld þe reyne
> Vp and doun he hit demeyniþ
> And doþ hit turne in ȝerdis leynþe
> And aforced hit by strenynthe
> He was bote tweol ȝeir old
> His dedis weore strong and bold.[63]

Alexander here resembles the typical knight-hero of romance, who often has first to reveal his prowess through a dramatic demonstration of his horsemanship and fighting skills. The horse test alone is sufficient in this instance to indicate Alexander's courage and greatness, and Philip accordingly recognises Alexander as his heir.

Another, later Middle English version, the alliterative *Wars of Alexander*, probably written in the first half of the fifteenth century, interestingly has a rather different emphasis in its adaptation of this episode.[64] Alexander goes to Bucephalas, undaunted by the horse's ferocity, and reaches his hand into the stall. The animal responds by instantly recognising Alexander as his master, with a very human gesture:

> ... he layd owt a lang neke & [likkys] hys hand,
> Faire faldes hys fete & falles hym to the erth,
> Hendly haldes vp hys heued, byheld in hys face,
> On Alexander aywhare euer elike wates.[65]

In this version, Bucephalas recognises Alexander's innate merit and potential without the hero having to master him physically. From that point on, Bucephalas is a one-man horse, allowing no one else to ride him, and acts as an extension of Alexander himself, symbolising his strength and renown.

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[63] *Kyng Alisaunder*, ed. by G.V. Smithers, EETS 227 (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), ll. 782-7.
[64] *The Wars of Alexander*, ed. by Hoyt N. Duggan and Thorlac Turville-Petre, EETS SS 10 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). For more information on the respective immediate sources of both Middle English texts, see Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, pp. 37 and 57.
[65] *Wars of Alexander*, ll. 778-81.

The partnership of horse and rider continues throughout Alexander's lifetime and the two become synonymous. As Anderson argues,

> Bucephalas became the equine counterpart of Alexander, and even within Alexander's lifetime their birth was synchronized – a fiction usually regarded as fact – and some of the later versions of the Alexander Romance actually synchronized their death.[66]

While *The Wars of Alexander* does not coordinate the deaths of the pair, it does offer a moving portrait of Alexander's grief when Bucephalas passes away:

> þe berne blischis on his blonke & seȝes his breth faile,
> Sighis selcuthly sare & sadli he wepis,
> For he had standen him in stede in stouris full hard,
> Won him wirschip in were, fra many wathe saued.
> þe kynge to þis carion castis his eȝen,
> Said, 'Farewele my faire foole; þou failid me neuire.
> Sall now þi flesch here be freten with fowlis & with wormes
> þat has so doȝtyly done? Nay driȝtin forbede!'
> þan bilds he þare a berynes þis beste in to ligg,
> Of schene schemerand gold as it a schrine ware,
> A tombe as a tabernacle & tildis vp a cite
> In reuerence of þat riche stede & eftir him it callis.[67]

Alexander anthropomorphises his dead horse and treats it as if it were a loyal retainer or even a beloved relative by interring it in an extremely costly tomb. In the flamboyant gesture of building a city as a memorial to Bucephalas, Alexander recalls his earlier action of establishing a city to preserve the memory of his own name. Alexander's desire is clearly to leave a tangible reminder of his existence for posterity. The fact that he creates a city to commemorate not only himself but also his horse is particularly significant, though, as it is indicative of the degree to which Bucephalas is part of Alexander's self-image.

If we accept that the horse is a reflection, or even a part, of Alexander's sense of selfhood, his behaviour can be interpreted as narcissistic. He invests considerable emotional energy in his relationship with a horse in order to reinforce his own personality. Although the Middle English text breaks off shortly after Bucephalas's

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[66] Andrew Runni Anderson, 'Bucephalas and his Legend', *American Journal of Philology*, 51 (1930), 1-21 (p. 1). Gwyn Jones notes likewise that many Celtic heroes are born at the same time as an animal, including Pryderi and Cúchulainn with colts, and Finn with a dog; see *Kings, Beasts and Animals* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 86 n. On a related note, the story motif of the faithful horse destined to cause the death of its master is common in many cultures; see Archer Taylor, 'The Death of Orvar Oddr', *Modern Philology*, 19:1 (1921), 93-106.

[67] *The Wars of Alexander*, ll. 5709-20.

death, it is apparent from its Latin source that the horse's death marks the beginning of the end for Alexander himself. Alexander's identity is inextricably bound up with that of his charger: it was the horse that identified him as rightful ruler and eventually its death foreshadows his own.

The Alexander story was well-known in the Middle Ages and contains a number of equine topoi in its extraordinary characterisation of Bucephalas that may well have influenced episodes in other romances. *William of Palerne*, an English translation made c. 1350-61 of an Old French original composed c. 1194-7, offers one such example, in which a horse is first to recognise the hero as the true, long-lost heir of the kingdom. The horse in question belonged to William's late father, King Ebroun, and had allowed no one to ride it since Ebroun's death, behaving so ferociously to all who approached that it had to be chained up. Although even William's mother has thus far failed to recognise the returning heir, the horse's reaction is instant:

> þe horse sone hadde savor of þat hende kniȝt,
> and wist, as God wold, it was is kinde lord.
> As blive al his bondes he tobrak for joy,
> and so gan fare wiþ his fet, and ferliche neiȝede,
> þat men wend he hade be wod ... .[68]

When William hears of the horse's fine qualities, he asks if he may use it in battle and when he approaches the stable, the horse falls to its knees, much like Bucephalas in *The Wars of Alexander*, and greets William joyfully. William is the first to ride the animal since his father; the horse serves as a tangible link between the two generations and proof that the son measures up to his father.

The loyalty of a horse to its rider is often elaborated upon in romance, so that the animal exhibits human behaviour, as in the examples above of kneeling horses. As we have seen too, bestiaries and other supposedly factual medieval texts state that horses display human emotions, such as weeping for the death of their riders. In the thirteenth-century Occitan romance *Jaufre*, the hero's horse is similarly anthropomorphised when he reacts to his owner's disappearance with a display of quite human hysteria. The episode occurs when Jaufre is tricked and pushed into a magical fountain, in which he

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[68] *William of Palerne*, ed. by G.H.V. Bunt (Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis, 1985), ll. 3235-9.

apparently drowns after sinking to the bottom because of the weight of his armour. His horse becomes very agitated:

> El cavals es enrabiatz
> Cant en vi son sennhor intrar
> Assi con si saupes parlar
> Brama, e crida, et endilha,
> E plaig si que fun meravilha,
> Anc bestia nun fes tal dol,
> Qu'el grata e fer, e mor lo sol,
> Puis gitals pes, e venc corrent
> Tro alla font, puis torna s'ent.
> E cant ac assat treballat
> E pron corregut pe lo prat,
> Lo seneschal de Brunescent
> O a vist ... .[69]

> [His horse went mad when it saw its master fall in and brayed and cried and whinnied as if it could speak, lamenting wondrously. No beast ever showed more sorrow. It stamped and pounded and gnawed at the ground, leapt about, rushed back and forth to the fountain. It charged about all over the meadow for a long time until Brunissen's seneschal noticed it ... .]

The loose steed is a clear signal that Jaufre has suffered a mishap and the seneschal and his companions react immediately, fearing the worst. A riderless horse is often significant since it raises questions about the fate of its owner. In romance, however, the riderless horse is usually misleading, as in *Jaufre*. Although the hero appears to have drowned, he has merely been lured into another kingdom through the magical gateway of the fountain and later returns safely.

In *Sir Ferumbras* too, the riderless horse causes those who see it to presume its rider is dead, which further emphasises the very close identification of a knight with his steed, so much so that they are perceived as an inseparable unit. When Richard of Normandy rides out to seek help for the besieged French, his horse returns to the French tower without him, and his compatriots are distressed:

> For ech of hem wende on is part þe Sarsyns had sleyn duk Richart.
> þey swere by Peter & Paule
> þat by hys stede þay knew þat cas, warfor þay prayde of god kyng of gras
> haue mercy of is saule.[70]

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[69] *Jaufré*, ll. 8436-48. Translations are based on those by Ross G. Arthur in *Jaufre: An Occitan Arthurian Romance* (London: Garland, 1992), with occasional emendations.
[70] *Sir Ferumbras*, ll. 3755-8.

The unaccompanied horse is immediately viewed as proof that its rider must be dead; it is an instantly (mis)readable symbol within its context. In fact, what the animal actually represents in this case is the defiance of Richard who has succeeded in passing through the enemy lines unharmed, alone and against all the odds. The horse itself has similarly taken on the Saracens single-handedly, on its return to the French tower, by fiercely resisting the enemy's attempts to capture it.

As in *Sir Ferumbras*, riderless horses often become fighters in their own right. It is most common in romance, though, for a riderless horse to fight against another horse rather than against people. Thus when Grime has overcome Gray-Steele, in the fifteenth-century *Eger and Grime*, he looks over and sees that their steeds are fighting, 'as they had done' (l. 1100). Similarly, in Chrétien's *Chevalier de la charette*, the horses of Lancelot and Meleagant appear to share their riders' hatred of one another. After the two knights have knocked each other to the ground, the riderless horses

> ... s'an vont amont et aval –
> li uns regibe, l'autres mort,
> que l'uns volsist l'autre avoir mort.[71]
>
> [run loose over hills and valleys, one of them kicking out, the other biting, attempting to kill each other.]

Likewise, in the thirteenth-century *chanson de geste* of *Huon de Bordeaux*, as Amauri and Huon engage in a judicial duel their horses also exchange blows.[72] Amauri's horse is killed by a kick to its head and then Huon's horse breaks two of Amauri's ribs, in defending itself against Amauri who seeks to avenge his animal's death. The two men then resume their fight and Huon overcomes his opponent.

On the surface, therefore, the outcomes of the horse and human fights appear to be equivalent. Yet, as Dubost argues, the human world contains many more complications than the straightforward animal one:

> Il n'en reste pas moins que le duel des chevaux avait été beaucoup plus net et plus probant que le duel des chevaliers, puisque Charlemagne,

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[71] Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot, or, The Knight of the Cart (Le Chevalier de la charette)*, ed. and trans. by William W. Kibler (London: Garland, 1981), ll. 7040-2. All translations of Chrétien's romances are based, with minor modifications, upon those in Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. by D.D.R. Owen (London: Dent, 1993).

[72] *Huon de Bordeaux*, ed. by Pierre Ruelle (Brussels: Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, 1960), ll. 1812-42. In the Middle English *Huon*, the fighting horses are mentioned only in a very brief aside.

> exploitant un vice de forme, refuse d'entériner la victoire acquise par Huon.[73]

Despite the fact that Huon has proved his innocence in the conventional romance manner, by defeating his accuser in a judicial duel, Charlemagne refuses to accept the result because Amauri died before he could confess the truth and thereby vindicate Huon. The horses' fight meanwhile is far more black and white and indeed reinforces the fact that Huon is being unfairly treated, since not only he but also his horse overcome their opponents to 'prove' that Huon had the right in the argument.

When Enyas's horse fights with his opponent's in the *Chevelere Assigne*, it blinds the other animal with a vicious kick.[74] The narrator describes this as the first advantage that the young hero gains in a fight that he will of course go on to win, despite his youth and inexperience. Usually, however, fighting horses do not assist, but merely mimic, their riders and express a sense of solidarity with them through their simultaneous equine combat. Another exception, though, is to be found in the much later *Chevalier du papegau* (late fifteenth- to early sixteenth-century), in which the motif of the fighting horse is still found, but in a watered-down fashion, when Arthur's horse intervenes to save his master's life. The horse in this romance does not play a significant role aside from this single episode. There is also an element of comedy in the scene since Arthur is under threat not from a typical knightly opponent but from a wild woman. The narrator tells us that Arthur would certainly have died

> se ne fust le destrier qui hennist et se mist a croler de force quant il senti celle malle chose, qu'elle en ot ung pou de paour, si qu'elle ovry ung peu ses bras.[75]
>
> [if it had not been for his horse, which started neighing and bucking violently upon sensing that evil thing, which caused her to be afraid and to loosen her grip a little bit.]

The horse here is credited merely with the ability to sense an evil presence and to react accordingly, rather than with any other more human qualities.[76]

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[73] Francis Dubost, 'De quelques chevaux extraordinaires', p. 195.
[74] *Chevelere Assigne*, in *Middle English Metrical Romances*, ed. by French and Hale, II, 857-73; ll. 321-5.
[75] *Le Chevalier du papegau*, ed. by Ferdinand Heuckenkamp (Halle: Niemeyer, 1896), p. 72; translations are from *The Knight of the Parrot (Le Chevalier du papegau)*, trans. by Thomas E. Vesce (London: Garland, 1986).
[76] Elsewhere, the idea of an animal's uncanny sixth sense is exploited further and the horse warns his rider of coming danger, as in *Renaut de Montauban*, in which Bayard wakes his master, Renaut, just in

The topos of fighting horses occurs regularly in romance and its popularity may be rooted in real-life practice. Davis observes that, throughout the Middle Ages,

> The warhorse was expected to fight in the battle himself, kicking, leaping and rearing at his opponents; he was encouraged to be ferocious, and for this reason was provided with a bit which was cruelly harsh on the mouth.[77]

Horse-fighting, whereby specially-trained stallions would fight each other, often to the death, was also a popular sport, particularly in the Viking world. Kavanagh remarks that 'There are many instances of this activity described in the sagas and depicted on picture-stones, such as Haggeby in Sweden'.[78] She furthermore observes that the sport 'was still popular in Ireland up to the end of the sixteenth century when it was finally banned'. First-hand experience of the sport may well have influenced some of the medieval literary depictions of fighting horses. Stallions can be particularly aggressive animals, which is a useful quality upon the battlefield but also requires careful management by the owners. It may be partly as a consequence that the topos of the one-man horse, who will not allow anyone else to control him, frequently occurs in medieval fiction.

Correspondingly, romances occasionally imply that characters who are unworthy of owning outstanding steeds may run into trouble because of them. Thus, in *Huon of Burdeux*, the German emperor places his life in danger when he and ten thousand of his men pursue his enemy, Huon. The emperor's horse is 'so good that he wold rynne as fast as a byrde coude flye / in al ye world there was no horse lyke to hym'.[79] This means, though, that the emperor leaves the rest of his army well behind so that when he rashly overtakes Huon, he is alone. In single combat he is defeated and almost killed by the hero and is only saved by the timely arrival of his men. A comparable fate befalls Claryon in *Sir Ferumbras*, who is, however, not so fortunate as

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time for him to save his brother, who is about to be hanged; *Renaut de Montauban*, ed. by Jacques Thomas (Geneva: Droz, 1989), ll. 9703-88. See also the article on the subject by Jean-Claude Vallecalle, '*Gesta dei per equos*. Remarques sur le rôle providential du cheval dans les chansons de geste', in *Le Cheval dans le monde médiéval*, pp. 561-71.

[77] Davis, *The Medieval Warhorse*, p. 18.

[78] Rhoda M. Kavanagh, 'The Horse in Viking Ireland', in *Settlement and Society in Medieval Ireland. Studies Presented to F.X. Martin, O.S.A.*, ed. by John Bradley (Kilkenny: Boethius Press, 1988), pp. 89-121 (p. 96).

[79] *Huon of Burdeux*, p. 291.

Huon's German emperor.[80] The swiftness of Claryon's horse results in his death as he chases, and catches up with, Richard. In the resulting encounter, Claryon is killed and Richard benefits from taking his steed, which is fresher and faster than his own.

Too good a horse can lead the unworthy warrior to his death. By contrast, knights of true worth, such as Richard, only benefit from a fine steed. Interestingly, though, Richard is in fact saddened to leave behind his faithful, but exhausted, horse:

> ... For þat stede ful wo hym ys,
> And saide þanne on is speche:
> 'Now Haue gode my gode morel,
> On many a stour þou hast seruid me wel,
> Crist ich þe by-teche!
> And god ȝut, if þy wille beo,
> Send me grace þat y mote þe seo,
> On crysten mannes welde.'[81]

He has clearly developed something of a sentimental attachment to the animal, due to its repeated service in battle after battle. In many romances that feature exceptional steeds, the rider's relationship with the animal is remarkable for its intensity. Gwara comments on the *Poema de Mio Cid*, for instance, that 'we see vividly the close relationship the Cid has with his charger, not merely another good horse, but a synergistic extension of his own valour and might'.[82] The Cid's horse is called Babieca and is further notable because it is the only steed named in the poem. Babieca recalls Bucephalas, in playing a larger part than that of 'merely another good horse'.

The idea that a knight's character is reflected in his horse, or the way it behaves, recurs time and again in romance and is particularly clear in the examples we have seen of extraordinary horses and their great masters. Aside from these marvellous steeds, however, there are a vast number of literary horses that tend not to be so different from real-life animals, albeit that they are idealised to the same extent as every other element of romance. Nevertheless, the horse's appearance or performance is still frequently used by authors to suggest details of the rider's temperament and personality.

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[80] *Sir Ferumbras*, ll. 3637-728.
[81] *Sir Ferumbras*, ll. 3711-16.
[82] Gwara, 'Equine Imagery', p. 14.

The Horse as a Symbol of Status

The phenomenon of the horse reflecting elements of its rider's character is particularly embraced by – but certainly not confined to – romance. As Potter says, 'The life of the epic horse ... resembles that of the epic hero'.[83] In medieval Welsh poetry too, Sioned Davies claims that 'the horse reflects the dual qualities of the hero himself – both his prowess and his generosity.'[84] Chaucer, meanwhile, specifies the type of horse ridden by several of his pilgrims in the prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* in order to match the character portraits and their social positions.[85] Mann argues that at least some of these horses complement the estates satire that Chaucer uses in his portraits and are consequently not individualising details so much as diagnostics of class. The Ploughman, for instance, rides a mare (l. 541) which is, as Mann observes, 'an inferior mount' and therefore fits with the type of lowly and poor character that Chaucer is painting, without being an essential part of the type-casting.[86] With reference to the Clerk, likewise, Mann points out that his profession is

> traditionally visualised as too poor to afford a horse, unlike rich lawyers or priests. Chaucer's Clerk must have a horse in order to join the pilgrimage, but it is fitting that it should be a wretched beast, 'as leene ... as is a rake' (287).[87]

Similarly, the Wife of Bath is not aristocratic enough to ride a palfrey, the preferred riding horse for a lady, but has instead the less costly alternative of an ambler (l. 469). The stot (a type of farm horse) used by the Reeve (l. 615) is likewise appropriate to his station, as manager of a lord's estate.

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[83] Murray Anthony Potter, 'The Horse as an Epic Character', in *Four Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917), pp. 109-39 (p. 125). Williamson comments that Potter 'shows how in a remarkably uniform way epic horses share many of the characteristics of the epic heroes who mount them, such as having miraculous origins and being fearsome warriors' ('The Image of the Horse', pp. 217-18).

[84] Davies, 'Horses in the *Mabinogion*', p. 135.

[85] For a study of Chaucer's pilgrims and their horses, see McLean, *The English at Play*, pp. 30-3. On a related note, Sandy Feinstein argues that, in the *Reeve's Tale*, the horse that the miller instructs the two clerks to catch is a gelding rather than a stallion, and that this may 'provide a sympathetic exemplum of frustrated impotence rather than of satisfied lust' and therefore be a reflection of the tale-teller, the Reeve, who has earlier spoken of desire but the inability (due to old age) to fulfil it. See Feinstein's article, 'The *Reeve's Tale*: About that Horse', *The Chaucer Review*, 26 (1991), 99-106 (p. 104).

[86] Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 72.

[87] Mann, *Chaucer*, p. 81.

Romances often use the horse in a slightly different way, to flag up something about the temporary condition of the rider, particularly when s/he has undergone a reversal of fortune. *Sir Isumbras* dramatically exemplifies this, when it tells how the hero is warned by God about his pride and told that, as a punishment, he will have to choose between woe in either his youth or old age. Isumbras opts for the former, and his fortunes are instantly changed. The narrator illustrates this well in a reference to Isumbras's horse:

> His steede that was so lyghte byfore,
> Dede under hym ley.[88]

The animal's sudden demise gives Isumbras a fall, both literally and metaphorically. The hero's loss is twofold: financial, in terms of the material worth of the horse, and a loss of status as he is reduced to travelling on foot. Since a horse is so necessary to a knight, the implication is that Isumbras is no longer in that situation and, indeed, the romance goes on to confirm this as the hero has to work as a blacksmith and later becomes a palmer.

In *Jaufre*, another variation on the motif arises when the hero has to make use of an ineffectual horse. Here, the horse's reduced condition does not reflect that of its rider, Jaufre, but the state of the people who have given him the animal so that he can fight on their behalf against a tyrant:

> Anz es fenis et de fam mortz
> Que .viij. jortz a, nun manjet blat
> Ni alres, mais erba de prat.
>
> [it was worn out and nearly dead with hunger, for it had gone eight days without grain or anything but prairie grass.][89]

Like the horse, the people are at their last gasp because of the devastation wreaked upon their land by Fellon d'Albarua and actually finish the last of their meagre food supplies on the night that Jaufre arrives. As we saw above in *Sir Isumbras* and *Huon of Burdeux*, the weakness of the horse does not have a detrimental effect upon the hero's performance and Jaufre succeeds in freeing the people from the oppression of Fellon.

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[88] *Sir Isumbras*, ll. 65-6.
[89] *Jaufré*, ll. 9062-4.

Less commonly, ladies too can be found in romance riding horses that make a statement about their circumstances. Chrétien creates a powerful image of suffering in the *Conte du Graal* by depicting both the pitiful condition of a lady and her palfrey: the two are completely united in shared affliction. The woman in question is the one whom Perceval finds in a pavilion very early in the tale, and kisses. He also exchanges his ring with hers, so that when her knight returns he believes her to have been unfaithful and punishes her harshly. When, by chance, Perceval encounters the lady again later in the narrative, she is greatly changed. Chrétien sets the scene by first describing the horse:

> Del palefroi estoit avis,
> Tant estoit maigres et chetis,
> Qu'il fust en males mains keüs.
> Bien traveilliez et mal peüs
> Sambloit que il eüst esté,
> Si comme on fait cheval presté
> Qui le jor est bien traveilliez
> Et la nuit mal apareilliez.
> Autel del parlefroi sambloit;
> Tant estoit maigres qu'il trambloit
> Ausi com s'il fust enfondus.
> Toz li caons li fu fondus
> Et les oreilles li pendoient. [90]
>
> [The palfrey was so skinny and wretched that it seemed to him to have fallen into bad hands. It appeared to have been overworked and underfed, just as one treats a borrowed horse, which is worked hard during the day and poorly looked after at night. That was how the palfrey looked: it was so thin that it shivered as if chilled to the bone. Its whole neck was bald, and its ears hung down.]

Chrétien continues by turning to the woman upon this animal, who is equally wretched, and focuses upon her torn and tattered dress and cracked skin. The two portraits of the palfrey and the lady reinforce each other and combine to create a very strong picture of enduring privation. Chrétien, though, only briefly uses this identification of woman with horse; while we learn that the lady recovers her former health and beauty after a bath and a change of clothing, the horse abruptly ceases to figure in the narrative and its fate remains unknown.

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[90] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Roman de Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal*, ed. by Keith Busby (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993), ll. 3695-707.

In all these instances, horses act as a temporary barometer for the condition of their riders, as opposed to becoming the permanent attribute of their owners like Alexander's Bucephalas. Thus a succession of different horses throughout a romance can similarly be used to reflect the way in which a character progresses. *Sir Percyvell of Gales* (c. 1400) offers a particularly good illustration of this technique in action. The Middle English *Percyvell* differs significantly from Chrétien's version, and its exact source is a matter of speculation. Mills surmises that

> if the English romance is indeed a translation from Chrétien's *Perceval*, it is one that is much too free to have been made from a written text of the French which ... was always before the redactor. A large part of his version seems likelier to depend on his memories of *Perceval*, or of a translation that at least stood quite close to it.[91]

In the Middle English tale, Perceval starts out on foot and it is only after a chance meeting with three Arthurian knights that he seeks to obtain a horse in order to imitate them. He comes across a field full of colts and mares and chooses the largest animal, which happens to be a pregnant mare, upon which to ride home. His acquisition of a horse greatly distresses his mother, who has taken immense care to protect him from the lifestyle that led to his father's death:

> Scho saw hym horse hame brynge;
> Scho wiste wele by that thynge,
> That the kinde wolde oute sprynge,
> For thynge that be moughte.[92]

Perceval's mother reacts to the horse because it is such a strong symbol of knighthood, even though the beast in question is in fact a pregnant mare and therefore a ridiculously unsuitable mount for a knight. Nevertheless – despite his ignorance of the difference between mares and stallions – Perceval is expressing his true nature, which his mother had hoped to suppress, by trying to act like a knight.

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[91] *Sir Percyvell of Gales*, in *Ywain and Gawain, Sir Percyvell of Gales, The Anturs of Arther*, ed. by Maldwyn Mills (London: Dent, 1992), p. xix. All references are to Mills's edition. See also Ad Putter, 'Story Line and Story Shape in *Sir Percyvell of Gales* and Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte du Graal*', in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England*, ed. by Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 171-96. On the symbolism of the different horses used by the hero in the Middle High German *Parzival*, see Jean-Marc Pastre, 'Les Montures de Parzival: quatre images de la carrière du héros de Wolfram von Eschenbach', in *Le Cheval dans le monde médiéval*, pp. 387-99.

[92] *Percyvell of Gales*, ll. 353-6.

Percyvell repeatedly exploits its hero's ignorance about knighthood, and especially about horses, for comic effect.[93] When the hero first asks his mother the name of the animal he is riding, she tells him it is a mare. Logically enough, Perceval concludes that all horses are called mares (ll. 369-72). Subsequently, after arriving at Arthur's court, he has no knowledge of etiquette and simply rides right up to the king's dinner table:

> At his firste in comynge,
> His mere, withowtten faylynge,
> Kyste the forhevede of the kynge –
> So nerehande he rade.
>
> The kyng had ferly thaa,
> And up his hande gan he taa,
> And putt it forthir hym fraa –
> The mouthe of the mere![94] (493-500)

Despite this apparently quite serious social faux pas, Perceval's inherent nobility is recognised by Arthur, who agrees to knight him.

The recognition of knightly potential in an unknown young hero, however unprepossessing his clothes or situation may make him appear, is a commonplace of romance. In such cases, the young man is seen by others (such as King Arthur with Perceval) to be of an unmistakably noble appearance. This initial favourable impression is then confirmed by the young knight's own actions, as he takes on his first combat or quest. As part of this, horsemanship is a key area in which the unknown hero must show instinctive expertise. The experiences of the young Enyas in the *Chevelere Assigne* illustrate this pattern: Enyas is still a boy, and just as ignorant as Perceval, when he learns that he must fight a single combat in order to save his innocent mother from being burnt. Enyas's only advisor, unfortunately, is a hermit who has led a very sheltered life. He knows that the boy must fight on a horse but has only a sketchy idea of what a horse is:

> 'I seyȝe neuur none,' quod þe hermyte 'but by þe mater of bokes.
> They seyn he hath a feyre hedde and fowre lymes hye,

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[93] On Perceval's comic ignorance of horses, see Caroline D. Eckhardt, 'Arthurian Comedy: The Simpleton-Hero in *Sir Perceval of Galles*', *The Chaucer Review*, 8 (1974), 205-20 (pp. 208-10).

[94] Although this scene is clearly designed to be comic, it does appear that to approach the king at his table without dismounting is not necessarily seen as discourteous. See, for example, Tydeus delivering his message to King Etiocles as he dines in the *Roman de Thèbes*, ll. 1267-72.

And also he is a frely beeste forthy he man serueth.'[95]

When Enyas arrives to fight, he is willingly knighted by the king, who is impressed by his noble appearance. Before the combat, Enyas questions a knight about the horse he will ride. Amongst other things he asks why the animal is eating iron (in response the knight explains that it is a bridle) and whether the saddle is part of the animal. In spite of his naivety and youth – he is only twelve years old – Enyas manages to knock his opponent off his horse during his first joust and evidently has no problems managing his charger. The boy is a king's son and, as is the case with Perceval and all the other young heroes who have been kept in ignorance of what horses and knights are, he proves to have natural ability on horseback.

Although Perceval seems easily able to manage a horse, the rest of his development into a truly knightly character takes much longer. He manages to slay the Red Knight with just one thrust of his spear, but does not realise that his opponent is dead. In a display of instinctive courtesy, he offers to fetch the dead man's charger (which Perceval persists in calling a mare) so that they can continue to fight fairly, each on horseback. This results in a comic scene, in which Perceval futilely chases around after a horse that is much faster than his own:

> The mere was bagged with fole
> And hirselfe a grete bole;
> For to rynne scho myghte not thole,
> Ne folowe hym no spede. (717-20)

Ironically, Perceval realises that he can actually move faster on foot and eventually catches the steed by running after it. His first mount has been a poor choice in several respects but does at least enable Perceval to enter into his first duel (even if he fights in a rather unconventional and uncouth way, with his spear) and thereby win his first properly knightly horse, a 'stede', to replace the mare.

With assistance from Gawain, Perceval is armed in the Red Knight's armour and leaps upon the dead man's horse. If external appearances are any indication, the hero has finally established himself as a knight. It is not until much later in the romance, however, that Perceval begins to develop a deeper understanding of knightly conduct.

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[95] *Chevelere Assigne*, ll. 216-18.

When he fights a sultan and knocks the man from his horse, he is unsure of how to continue the fight and, again, it is Gawain who acts as advisor and instructs him to dismount and resume the battle on foot. It is only at this point, too, that Perceval accidentally learns from Gawain that his steed is not in fact a mare (ll. 1690-1), a discovery that amazes him. This episode marks a turning point for the hero, since he has at last begun to understand the techniques of knightly combat, and finally corrects his comic misuse of horse terminology.

The romance concludes, however, with Perceval's decision to find his mother again in the forest, after he learns that she has become mad with grief, believing that her son is dead. Perceval makes a vow that

> I sall never one horse ryde
> Till I have sene hir in tyde. (2177-8)

He also removes his armour and wears a goat skin again, just as he did at the beginning of the tale. Perceval's search for his mother is a return to his origins, and he therefore strips off all the external symbols of knighthood in order to return simply as her son. Although the trappings of knighthood can be easily removed, Perceval's newly-acquired knowledge will remain with him and it is naturally implied that he will resume his chivalric life once he has found his mother.

The belief found in *Percyvell* that knightly instincts (which are usually present only in nobly-born youths) can be only temporarily repressed is one evinced by many romances. It is a theme developed in *Octavian* (c. 1350), in particular, by highlighting the innate connection between knight and horse. Florent is sent by the burgess Clement, who is his adoptive father, to deliver forty pounds to Clement's brother, but on his way through Paris the boy is distracted:

> He sye where stode a feyre stede,
> Was stronge yn eche werre;
> The stede was whyte as ony mylke,
> The brydyll reynys were of sylke,
> The molettys gylte they were.[96]

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[96] *Octavian*, in *Six Middle English Romances*, ed. by Maldwyn Mills (London: Dent, 1992), ll. 716-20.

The quality of the horse's trappings indicates that it is a valuable animal, and Florent judges it to be the finest horse he has ever seen. He asks if it is for sale and, when the owner replies that he will sell it for thirty pounds, insists that it is undervalued and instead gives him the whole forty pounds with which he has been entrusted. Florent then rides his new mount home and puts it in the hall, rather than stabling it, an action that indicates his pride in his purchase and perhaps also his ignorance of how a horse should be kept.

Cohen points out that forty pounds is not only the sum paid for the white horse, but also the figure asked by the outlaws earlier in the romance when they sell the very young Florent to Clement. Being a keen businessman, Clement bargains with the men and only pays twenty pounds. Cohen argues that the repetition of the sum of forty pounds sets up

> a symbolic equivalence between the horse and its new owner, between the two bodies in their mutual potentiality. Forty pounds, by no coincidence, was also repeatedly declared to be the statutory threshold of English knighthood ... .[97]

Clement is predictably furious with his 'son' for apparently wasting forty pounds on a horse, which is not a practical purchase for someone in his station in life. It is only after Florent has proved himself as a knight by defeating a giant upon his white horse that Clement changes his opinion and tells Florent,

> Now me thynkyth yn my mode
> Thou haste well besett my gode,
> Soche playes forto lere.[98]

However, Florent's knightly identity is clearly indicated even before he takes up arms and demonstrates his prowess, by his desire for a good horse.

Almost always, the matching of noble horse with noble knight is an idea that romance takes for granted. Colliot summarises the way in which this pairing works in *Amadas et Ydoine*, but her comments could equally well refer to a more general trend in romance:

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[97] Jeffrey J. Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 67.
[98] *Octavian*, ll. 955-7.

> Dans tout le récit on aperçoit le cheval à côté des héros, figurant dans leurs entreprises et leurs espoirs, ami courageux, preuve de leur noblesse d'âme et de leur rang social, auxiliaire de leur beauté, soutien indispensable de leur vaillance; dans l'ombre du maître médiéval, le cheval est son témoin, son signal 'A tel maître, tel cheval'.[99]

By contrast, *Valentine and Orson*, a romance translated by Henry Watson from a French original in around 1503-5, reverses the usual pattern by using a love of fine horses to cast aspersions on a protagonist's character.[100] An evil archbishop disguises himself as a knight, in order to pursue Bellyssant, with whom he wishes to 'do his pleasure'. He mounts his 'swyfte courser' and the narrator adds that the horse is one of the best coursers in Constantinople.[101] This hardly seems suitable for a clergyman, and provides a damning insight into the character of the archbishop: he is a keen hunter and sexual predator. The association of religious figures with hunting is a traditional one, in texts that sought to satirise church officials.[102] Chaucer's disreputable Monk is similarly enthusiastic about the sport, and we learn in the *General Prologue* that he keeps 'ful many a deyntee hors' in his stables (l. 168). He furthermore rides a palfrey (l. 207) on the pilgrimage, which is indicative of his affluence and reveals that he possesses fine horses not only for hunting but also for other purposes such as travelling.

From Aristotle onwards, the horse had been associated with passion and lust, and by the Middle Ages the 'passionate' horse was as much of a commonplace as the cunning fox or faithful turtle-dove.[103] Frequently in medieval and Renaissance works, the idea is developed so that the horse represents 'the passions of man, unbridled and uncontrolled by the rider Reason'.[104] This image is popular in Christian teaching and Kolve quotes St Gregory as an example:

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[99] Régine Colliot, 'Les Chevaux symboliques d'*Amadas et Ydoine*', in *Le Cheval dans le monde médiéval*, pp. 93-113 (p. 112).

[100] The English romance is a translation of the French prose *Valentin et Orson*, composed between 1475 and 1489 and probably based upon a lost fourteenth-century French poem.

[101] Henry Watson, *Valentine and Orson*, ed. by Arthur Dickson, EETS 204 (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 26. On the romance's textual history, see Helen Cooper, 'The Strange History of *Valentine and Orson*', in *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Romance*, ed. by Rosalind Field (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), pp. 153-68.

[102] See Mann, *Chaucer*, pp. 23-4.

[103] See Francis Klingender, *Animals in Art and Thought to the End of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Evelyn Antal and John Harthan (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 152-3.

[104] Nona C. Flores, '"Effigies Amicitiae ... Veritas Inimicitiae": Antifeminism in the Iconography of the Woman-Headed Serpent in Medieval and Renaissance Art and Literature', in *Animals in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Flores (London: Garland, 1996), pp. 167-95 (p. 187). Flores adds that 'For the

> Indeed the horse is the body of any holy soul, which it knows how to restrain from illicit action with the bridle of continence and to release in the exercise of good works with the spur of charity.[105]

As well as signifying such base instincts, the horse is sometimes used to represent stupidity, and Williamson convincingly argues that this is the case in Beroul's *Tristan*, in the episode in which it is revealed that King Mark has horse's ears: 'Le secret inavouable de Marc révélé par la divulgation de ses oreilles de cheval est sa folie.'[106] Although folly is more often associated with the ass, the horse is frequently stereotyped in a similar manner.

Conversely, however, the horse is also considered one of the most noble of beasts, a fitting mount for a great warrior and it is this view that tends to prevail in romance. Thus, according to the Gospel writers, Christ was keen to avoid the animal's strong martial associations for His famous entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday when He chose to ride a donkey instead of a more imposing animal.[107] In *Piers Plowman*, too, Christ is described as a knight come to joust in Jerusalem, but upon an ass rather than a horse:

> Barefoot on an asse bak bootles cam prikye,
> Withouten spores other spere; spakliche he loked,
> As is the kynde of a knyght that cometh to be dubbed.[108]

The horse, unlike more modest riding animals such as the donkey and mule, is also at times a symbol of pride. Billington observes that this is particularly the case in English mystery cycles and French passion plays: 'On the surface the horse appears the worthy animal and the ass the worthless, but in these examples their symbolic value is the

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medieval world the idea stemmed from the Pauline idea of the *homo duplex* or double nature of man, whose passionate, sinful side was compared to the rider who should exert his control over his mount'.

[105] V.A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (London: Arnold, 1984), pp. 240-1.

[106] Joan B. Williamson, 'Les Oreilles de cheval du roi Marc dans le *Roman de Tristan* de Béroul', in *Provinces, régions, terroirs au Moyen Age de la réalité à l'imaginaire*, ed. by Bernard Guidot (Nancy: Presses universitaires de Nancy, 1993), pp. 239-49 (p. 246). It is likely that Beroul's source here was Celtic legend, which contains several stories of men with horse's ears, and the link is further suggested by the fact that *marc* in Celtic languages means horse. See Béroul, *The Romance of Tristran*, ed. and trans. by Norris J. Lacy (London: Garland, 1989), ll. 1307-47.

[107] See, for example, Matthew 21. 1-9.

[108] William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. by A.V.C. Schmidt (London: Dent, 1987), Passus XVIII, 11-13.

reverse.'[109] The famous Christian image of Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey is clearly the inspiration for these plays, in which an ass tends to be ridden by characters who signify Christian humility, such as Mary and Joseph on the flight to Egypt.

Unlike these religious figures, a knight without a horse is incomplete and also at his most vulnerable because he is deprived of the freedom of movement that the steed grants its rider. As I observed previously, Gawain is the one Arthurian hero who is consistently associated with a specific, named horse. When in Chrétien's *Conte du Graal*, Gringalet is stolen by Greoreas, Gawain is outraged to be left with only an old *roncin*.[110] Although he doggedly tries to treat the nag as he would his own horse, the beast will not respond and Gawain has to joust with Greoreas's nephew (who is mounted upon Gringalet) without being able to run at him. Gawain is nonetheless successful from his stationary position, and is extremely happy to reclaim his own horse, although it does appear that his joy is less a sentimental response to winning back Gringalet than relief at being seated upon a charger once again.

L'Atre périlleux is another Gawain romance of the mid-thirteenth century, which features Gringalet even more prominently and goes much further towards suggesting that the pair are inseparable. When night falls, Gawain is offered shelter in a castle but is told he must climb the wall in order to enter, leaving his horse to graze outside, as the gates cannot be unbarred before daylight. Gawain, however, is worried about Gringalet's unfamiliarity with the land and the threat from wild animals. He therefore declares, 'Certes ja ni remanra sex, / Ains prendrai o lui bien et mal' [I will never leave him here alone. Whether for good or evil – I will stay with him].[111] The squire who has offered Gawain shelter evidently thinks this response is irrational and attempts to persuade him to change his mind:

> 'Si vous,' fait il, 'por un ceval
> Vous i laisciés de gré morir,
> Por fol vous en porrés tenir.
> Cevax recouverrés assés ... .' (863-6)
>
> ['If you,' the squire replied, 'let yourself

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[109] Billington, 'The *Cheval fol*', p. 27.
[110] *Le Conte du* Graal, ll. 7071-7363.
[111] Text and translation are from *The Perilous Cemetery (L'Atre Périlleux)*, ed. and trans. by Nancy B. Black (London: Garland, 1994), ll. 862-3.

Die on account of a horse,
You could be taken for a fool.
You will easily get another horse ... .']

Nonetheless, Gawain steadfastly refuses to abandon Gringalet, who is here clearly not just a good horse, but a partner to whom Gawain demonstrates his loyalty by refusing to enter the castle without him.

This idea of companionship between man and horse is one to which the poet alludes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* when he describes the hero's lonely search for the Green Knight: 'Hade he no fere bot his fole'.[112] Even when a special bond between rider and horse is not suggested, as in *The Jeaste of Sir Gawain*, being reduced to going on foot is not a happy state. In this fifteenth-century romance, Gawain unhorses and comprehensively defeats Sir Gylbert and two of his sons. The fact that all three have to walk away from the fight (their horses run off when the riders are unseated) adds insult to injury and humbles them still further in defeat. As Gylbert observes his first son returning on foot, he says:

Thou went on horsebacke, lyke a good knyght,
And nowe I see thou arte dolefully dyght.[113]

The son's horselessness is a clear sign of the loss of status and reputation he has suffered. Ironically, however, Gawain too ultimately ends up on foot. His fight with the third brother is postponed as night falls, but not before his horse is too injured to ride. Moreover, since he must walk back to the court, Gawain is obliged to cut off his heavy armour and is left with neither arms nor mount, a condition that would normally resonate with the shame of defeat.[114] It appears that the hero does not, after all, escape unpunished for his seduction of Gylbert's daughter, the act that sets in motion all the subsequent events of the narrative.

Loss of a horse can be frustrating, dangerous and humiliating, depending on the circumstances. Probably the most famous medieval image of a knight without a horse,

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[112] *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Cleanness, Patience*, ed. by A.C. Cawley and J.J. Anderson (London: Dent, 1991), l. 695.
[113] *The Jeaste of Sir Gawain* in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. by Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1995), ll. 185-6.
[114] Cf. Calogrenant in *Yvain*, who loses his horse when defeated by the knight of the spring and leaves behind his arms 'por plus aler legieremont'; Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier au lion (Yvain)*, ed. by Mario Roques, CFMA 89 (Paris: Champion, 1965), l. 559.

though, is that created by Chrétien in his *Chevalier de la charette*.[115] When Lancelot climbs into a cart in order to follow the abducted Guinevere, he submits himself to public ridicule. Carts were commonly used to parade convicted criminals around in order to humiliate them, or even sometimes to transport the guilty to the gallows. Lancelot loses the visible sign of noble status that he would immediately have were he to be on horseback and, moreover, immediately falls under suspicion of being a criminal.

The way in which an individual behaves towards horses can be quite revealing about his/her character. Riding a horse to death may suggest carelessness and reflect badly upon the rider, but in literature it is more often seen as a positive feat. So in *Valentine and Orson*, we are told that Valentine 'bare hym so rygorously that day th[at] he slewe foure horses vnder hym'.[116] Presumably, this is because Valentine is riding the animals so hard that they collapse from exhaustion, and the hero's own remarkable level of physical endurance is thereby highlighted in contrast. Chrétien's Lancelot, meanwhile, wears out two horses in the space of less than fifty lines and his treatment of the beasts mirrors his own intemperate behaviour, which is not, however, necessarily a negative quality. When Lancelot first appears in the romance he is not named but introduced to us through Gawain's eyes:

> ne tarda gaires quant il voit
> venir un chevalier le pas
> sor un cheval duillant et las,
> apantoisant et tressüé. [117]
>
> [before long he (Gawain) saw a knight approaching at a walk on a horse that was weary to the point of exhaustion, breathing hard and lathered with sweat.]

He encounters Gawain, who is leading two chargers, and asks his fellow knight to give or loan him one of the horses. Gawain replies by courteously offering him whichever animal he prefers. Lancelot is in such haste that he does not bother to choose but

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[115] *Le Chevalier de la charette*, ll. 323-586. For further analysis of this episode, see David J. Shirt, 'Chrétien de Troyes and the Cart', in *Studies in Medieval Literature and Languages in Memory of Frederick Whitehead*, ed. by W. Rothwell, W.R.J. Barron, David Blamires and Lewis Thorpe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973), pp. 279-301.
[116] *Valentine and Orson*, p. 62.
[117] *Chevalier de la charette*, ll. 270-4.

simply leaps onto the nearest one and gallops away to resume his pursuit of the abducted Guinevere. The narrator then tells us that the horse Lancelot abandoned fell dead (ll. 296-8). Gawain follows in Lancelot's wake:

> Et quant il ot grant piece alé,
> si retrova mort le destrier
> qu'il ot doné au chevalier,
> et vit molt grant defoleïz
> de chevax et grant froisseïz
> d'escuz et de lances antor.[118]
>
> [Having gone some distance, Gawain came upon the charger he had given the knight; but it was dead and round it he saw the ground much trampled by horses and many signs of the shattering of shields and lances.]

It is at this point that Lancelot is left with the option of either continuing on foot or riding in the fateful cart.

Lancelot does not – and the text implies that he should not – show moderation in his pursuit of Guinevere. A knight would not generally be expected to mistreat his steed in the way that Lancelot does, so much so that the horses do not form a useful partnership with him (as is the case with many romance protagonists) or even serve their purpose as effective transport. It is, however, Lancelot's all-consuming love for the queen that drives his behaviour and the dead horses are in fact visible proof of the strength of that love, just as is his act of riding in the shameful cart. Behaviour similar to that of Lancelot is satirised in Chaucer's *Sir Thopas*, when the hero falls in 'love-longynge' (l. 772) and decides to gallop furiously to Fairy Land, to find a fairy queen to love. Chaucer's pilgrim tells the audience,

> His faire steede in his prikynge
> So swatte that men myghte him wrynge;
> His sydes were al blood. (775-7)

Thopas is clearly ridiculed, particularly as he has no specific lady in mind and therefore acts with unnecessary haste and effort. Chaucer's comic portrayal of Thopas further suggests that the lovesick knight, who goes to extremes for the sake of his love, was something of a cliché in romance.

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[118] *Chevalier de la charette*, ll. 304-9.

Although Lancelot's repeated riding of horses to death can be explained and excused by his ardent desire to rescue the queen, killing an opponent's horse is a far more serious crime and breach of chivalric etiquette. When, in *Bevis of Hampton*, a giant strikes a blow at the hero but accidentally kills his horse instead, Bevis is furious:

> Þou hauest don gret vileinie,
> Whan þow sparde me bodi
> And for me gilt min hors aqueld,
> Þow witest him, þat mai nouȝt weld.
> Be god, i swere þe an oþ:
> Þow schelt nouȝt, whan we te-goþ,
> Lauȝande me wende fram,
> Now þow hauest mad me gram![119]

To slay an adversary's horse signifies an extreme lack of sportsmanship in a knightly contest and is here perceived as an outrage by Bevis even though the giant did not act intentionally. In real-life tournaments, likewise, participants were not supposed to strike at the horses, and could be disqualified if they were to do so. Geoffrey de Charny wrote down a detailed list of *Demandes pour la joute, les tournois, et la guerre* in the fourteenth century, and one of the issues he raises is when should a knight who has killed or injured his opponent's horse make reparation.[120] Unfortunately, his questions survive without answers, but it is apparent that horses were not considered to be legitimate targets in knightly combat.

In addition to the symbolically shaming act of riding in a cart rather than on horseback, there are several other medieval customs or forms of punishment that involve a perverted use of a horse or its accoutrements. The act of riding backwards on a horse, for instance, flaunts normal courtly convention and immediately suggests cowardice. Putter discusses the episode in the *Perlesvaus*, in which the Handsome Coward rides facing his horse's tail and states that

> The symbolic significance is apparent to anyone familiar with the medieval ritual of carnivalesque gender inversion known as the 'Skimmington Ride', in which a man beaten by his wife was paraded

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[119] *Bevis of Hampton*, in *Four Romances of England: King Horn, Havelok the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, Althelston*, ed. by Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Duke and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1999), ll. 1891-8.

[120] See Richard Barber and Juliet Barker, *Tournaments: Jousts, Chivalry and Pageants in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1989), pp. 191-2.

> through the village, decked out as a woman, and seated backwards on an ass or a horse.[121]

Along similarly humiliating lines, a man could also be punished by being treated as a horse, for there was a practice, attested to in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum anglorum* and in French sources of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, that required a wrongdoer to be saddled:

> The unhappy man (for it seems always to have been a man) was obliged to bear a saddle either on his back or shoulders – which may mean that it was actually buckled on – or slung from his neck or balanced upon his head.[122]

Upon occasion, the punishment was even performed voluntarily; for example, a vassal might seek his lord's pardon with a show of humility. Hemming cites several examples of the punishment/custom being undertaken by rebellious nobles, including some quite high-profile figures such as French counts and dukes.[123] She rightly points out that

> For the equestrian nobleman, the horse – and by extension its saddle – was the source of his power, prestige and social standing. To change places with his horse would have been a very specific blow to his pride as a knight ... .[124]

Conversely, a horse could also be punished for its rider's crime: 'A Breton law provided that, should a noble be found guilty of rape, his horse would be castrated and its tail clipped, his hawk debeaked and declawed ... .'[125] As Salisbury suggests,

> This law points to the degree that the image of the nobility was linked to their noble animals. The humiliation of the most valuable noble animals was certainly seen as additional punishment for the owner.[126]

A knight's relationship with his horse is more complicated than it at first appears, and a very close bond could develop. The horse that is castrated for its master's crime and the man who bears his horse's saddle for his own misdemeanours highlight the fluidity of

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[121] Ad Putter, 'Arthurian Literature and the Rhetoric of Effeminacy', in *Arthurian Romance and Gender: Selected Proceedings of the XVIIth International Arthurian Congress*, ed. by Friedrich Wolfzettel (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 34-49 (p. 40). See also Ruth Mellinkoff, 'Riding Backwards: Theme of Humiliation and Symbol of Evil', *Viator*, 4 (1973), 153-76.

[122] Jessica Hemming, '*Sellam Gestare*: Saddle-Bearing Punishments and the Case of Rhiannon', *Viator*, 28 (1997), 45-64 (p. 45).

[123] See Hemming, '*Sellam Gestare*', pp. 46-51.

[124] Hemming, '*Sellam Gestare*', p. 53.

[125] Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, p. 71. Cohen's source is Henry de Bracton's thirteenth-century *Laws and Customs of England.*

[126] Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, pp. 40-1.

the boundaries between animal and human. Romances play with such ideas further by characterising certain horses to such a degree that they assume a role of sufficient importance to rival some of the human characters of the tale. Therefore when, as happens very frequently, the horse is used as a gift, it is by no means a neutral object but comes with resonances and undertones of meaning that can be hugely significant.

Gift-Horses

The Trojan horse, and the cunning deception for which it stands, was well-known in the Middle Ages. In Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*, the harmless gift to King Cambyuskan of a brass horse immediately suggests parallels with the Trojan horse and arouses at least one onlooker's fears:

> 'Myn herte', quod oon, 'is everemoore in drede;
> I trowe som men of armes been therinne,
> That shapen hem this citee for to wynne.' (212-14)

Retellings of the siege of Troy were popular, yet otherwise the most famous gift-horse of all has few medieval analogues. One exception appears in the fourteenth-century *Richard Coer de Lyon* when Saladin challenges Richard to single combat in order to determine whose gods are the stronger. Saladin offers his opponent one of his own horses:

> In alle þe landes þere þou hast gon,
> Swylk on say þou neuere non!
> Ffauuel of Cypre, ne Lyard of prys,
> Are nouȝt at nede as þat he is;
> And, ȝiff þou wylt, þis selue day
> It schal be brouȝt þe to asay.[127]

No daring knight, it appears, can resist the temptation to put a good horse through its paces and, like Perceval on the Grail Quest, Richard all too eagerly accepts the offer without pausing to be suspicious of the intentions behind it. It seems unlikely that Richard's sworn enemy is simply acting upon a generous impulse and, sure enough, the gift of the horse is part of a deceitful plan. Saladin sends for a necromancer,

> Þat coniuryd, as j ȝow telle,

[127] *Der Mittelenglische versroman über Richard Löwenherz*, ed. by Karl Brunner (Vienna and Leipzig: Braumüller, 1913), ll. 5505-10.

Þorwȝ þe ffendes crafft off helle
Twoo stronge ffeendes off þe eyr
In lyknesse off twoo stedes ffeyr,
Lyke boþe of hewe and here. (5533-7)

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Þat on was a mere lyke,
Þat oþer a colt, a noble stede.
Where that he were, in ony nede,
Was neuere kyng ne knyȝt so bolde
Þat whenne þe mere neyȝe wolde,
Scholde hym holde agayn his wylle,
Þat he ne wolde renne here tylle,
And knele adoun, and souke hys dame:
Therwhyle þe Sawdon wiþ schame
Scholde kyng Richard aquelle. (5540-49)

Fortunately for Richard, his God does prove to be the stronger and an angel warns him of the danger behind the gift. Since the horse is in fact a fiend, Richard will come to no harm if he rides upon it 'in Goddes name' (l. 5565). Saladin's trickery fails as Richard blocks the horse's ears with wax so that it cannot be distracted by the mare's neighing into running off uncontrollably with its rider. Evidently, even a devilish horse can be put to good use if the Christian God so wishes, as the animal performs well and enables Richard to overcome his foe.

Another romance episode that shows more specific influence of the Trojan horse motif occurs in *Guy of Warwick*, as the eponymous hero goes to his enemy, Duke Otous, in disguise and uses the gift of a horse to gain access to the duke's innermost circle.[128] Guy offers the duke a steed that he claims is peerless and faster than a leopard. He further alleges that the extraordinary animal will kill anyone who comes near it with the exception of himself. The unsuspecting duke is grateful, believing that the horse could be very useful against his enemies, and offers to retain Guy with the horse. Guy, however, simply uses the pretext of the horse as a ruse to get close enough to his enemies to find and free his imprisoned companions, and then murders the duke.

However, aside from Guy's reworking of the Trojan horse ploy and the fiendish horses given to Richard and to Perceval, in the vast majority of romances equine gifts

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[128] *The Romances of Guy of Warwick, from the Auchinleck MS and the Caius MS I, II, III*, ed. by Julius Zupitza, EETS ES 42, 49, 59 (London: Trübner, 1883, 1887, 1891), ll. 5785-6120. *Guy of Warwick* first appears as an Anglo-Norman romance of around 1232-42; the earliest translation into Middle English may have been made in approximately 1300.

tend to be genuine and not intended to cause harm. The knight of medieval romance is a frequent gift-giver, since it is important for him to demonstrate his generosity as he rewards his retainers or seeks to impress his equals. The ability to make such gifts is an issue particularly emphasised in *Sir Launfal*, in which the hero is overlooked by the king and consequently becomes reduced to poverty. As soon as Launfal's situation changes and his fairy mistress supplies him with an abundance of material goods, he immediately reassumes the role of munificent donor. Amongst other acts of charity, the hero holds rich feasts and feeds fifty poor guests, delivers fifty prisoners, rewards fifty religious folk and gives fifty strong steeds and rich clothes to some knights and squires.[129] Launfal's actions ensure that each class of person is rewarded according to his/her station; it is only the knights and squires, members of the nobility, who receive horses.

Similarly, in the thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman *Yder*, the eponymous hero chooses to send the five costly horses that he wins in a series of jousts to the host who had given him lodging the previous night.[130] Yder's host is a noble man who has fallen upon hard times, and his nobility clearly shines through his poverty in the generous welcome he accords to the travelling knight. The gift of the horses undoubtedly has a very practical, monetary, side to it and puts an end, at least in the short-term, to the host's financial worries. In addition, though, ownership of such fine horses is a strong indicator of social rank and Yder's presentation of them to his host recognises the man as someone of status, for whom such animals are entirely fitting.

Couillet remarks that the gift of a horse carries a considerable symbolic value:

> Le cheval étant le symbole du pouvoir que le roi et les hommes de guerre exercent sur le peuple, le don du cheval est un signe de reconnaissance entre le bénéficiaire et le donateur; il manifeste qu'ils appartiennent à la même classe.[131]

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[129] *Sir Launfal*, ll. 424-6. Marie de France's *Lanval* makes no mention of horses amongst the gifts given by her hero, but Chestre was probably following *Landevale* (the text of which is also published in Bliss's edition of *Launfal*), which does briefly allude to presents of 'grette stedys' (l. 175) although the recipients are not specified.

[130] Cf. Chrétien's Erec, who rewards his host with seven chargers; *Erec et Enide*, ll. 3493-3515.

[131] Reynald Couillet, 'Le Motif du don du cheval dans le *Lancelot* en prose', in *Le Cheval dans le monde médiéval*, pp. 161-71 (p. 169).

Although this is certainly true in instances such as those detailed above involving Yder and Launfal, I am not convinced that it is always exactly the case. In literature in particular, it is not unusual for a knight to reward the hospitality or kindness of someone of a lower class than himself with a horse, and in such a situation the gift-horse can have an ennobling or aspirational quality. So in *Athelston* and *Sir Launfal*, for example, horses are given to messengers as remuneration for their services.[132] Although medieval romance is generally very elitist, there is some indication perhaps that individuals can merit advancement in society through worthy behaviour. Thus, in *Erec et Enide*, a squire generously offers food and drink to the weary protagonists when he realises that they must have spent the night in the woods.[133] Erec accepts the meal – and the squire's service of it – gratefully and in return offers him his choice of one of the eight chargers he has captured from earlier opponents. The squire selects the one that he judges to be best and the horse is such a fine animal that it attracts attention. When the local count sees the squire upon it, 'molt s'an est merveilliez' [he was quite amazed] to learn that it is the squire's own property.[134] Although a squire is certainly not a member of the lower classes, he would still not be expected to own a horse of the same quality as a knight. Indeed, the squire's willing service to Erec demonstrates the inequality of the two men, recognised by both parties. Erec's gift, however, rewards the man's generosity (in romance, a much valued characteristic of a true nobleman) and symbolically raises his status by giving him a knight's mount.

In reality, the givers of gift-horses were most likely to be kings and leading aristocrats. The ritual of gift-giving could become quite competitive as each side tried to outdo the other, as was the case with the elaborate ceremonial meeting of the English and French at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520. Russell states that accounts from the Master of King Henry's Armoury show that extensive purchases of horses were made before the celebrated event:

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[132] *Athelston*, ll. 729-46; *Sir Launfal*, ll. 545-6.
[133] *Erec et Enide*, ll. 3086-126.
[134] *Erec et Enide*, l. 3182.

> It was not only a question of choice mounts for the king, but also of suitable coursers to be presented to King Francis, for at the meeting the monarchs vied with one another in this expensive form of courtesy.[135]

She adds that there were many occasions upon which either king would admire a horse and subsequently be presented with it: 'Clearly the horses were a centre of rivalry and close comparison.'[136] Just as the stereotyped alpha male today is obsessed with the highest quality cars, so his medieval equivalent appears to have been inordinately fascinated by horses. Equines were not, however, only the domain of men: a significant number of literary women figure as donors (and also, but less often, as recipients) of gift-horses.

Fairy mistresses, as in *Sir Launfal* for example, are particularly likely to give their human lovers a gift in the form of a horse.[137] Loomis, indeed, notes that 'the gift of a remarkable horse to her lover or protégé was one of the characteristic acts of Morgain [la Fée]'.[138] The topos of the fairy mistress as gift-giver has a long literary tradition and, as Cross asserts,

> The nature of the gifts conferred by the fée upon her lover varies to suit the social *milieux* in which the stories took shape, but the Celtic and Romance accounts have this in common: each in the spirit of its own time has made the other-world woman bestow upon the mortal the things most to be desired by warriors in the barbaric and chivalric ages respectively – rich garments, a valuable chess-board, a gilt chariot, impenetrable armor, and magic horses.[139]

Even a non-magical horse can be a highly-prized object for a romance knight who will spend so much time upon its back and depend upon it in battle.

The horse therefore functions as a desirable reward and also as a love-token, and is used in this way not only by fairy mistresses but also by ordinary women, such as Desonelle, the king of Portugal's daughter, in the late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-

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[135] Joycelyne G. Russell, *The Field of the Cloth of Gold: Men and Manners in 1520* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 119.
[136] Russell, *The Field of the Cloth of Gold*, pp. 119-20.
[137] The fairy, Tryamour, gives Launfal her own 'stede lel' (l. 326), along with a squire and an abundance of wealth. Launfal's new steed is so highly esteemed that the lords of Karlyoun call a tournament 'For loue of Syr Launfel / (And for Blaunchard, hys good stede)' (ll. 435-6).
[138] Loomis cites as examples the *Roman de Troie*, in which Morgain gives Hector a very fine horse, and *Floriant et Florete*, in which she gives her foster son what is allegedly the most handsome destrier in the world. Roger Sherman Loomis, *Arthurian Tradition & Chrétien de Troyes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), p. 88.
[139] Tom Peete Cross, 'The Celtic Element in the Lays of *Lanval* and *Graelent*', *Modern Philology*, 12 (1915), 585-644 (p. 630).

century *Torrent of Portyngale*. *Torrent's* heroine honours her lover with the gift of a white horse when he returns from slaying his first giant:

> Forthe sche browght a whyt sted,
> As whyt as the flowyr in med,
> Ys fytte blac ase slon.
> 'Leman, haue here thys fole,
> That dethe ys dynt schalt þou not thole,
> Whyll thow settyste hyme appon,
> And yf thow had persewyd be
> And hadyst ned fore to fle,
> Fast for to gone.
> The kyng of Nazareth sent hym me,
> Torrent, I wet-saffe hym on the,
> For better love may I none.'[140]

Although the horse apparently has extraordinary properties that will protect Torrent's life, these are never subsequently mentioned and are merely an element of hyperbole in the portrait of a very attractive horse. The white steed has no further significance in the tale but functions simply as a gesture of Desonelle's love and Torrent's worth. Desonelle's words as she presents the animal are almost a form of blessing on her lover, full of desire that he should not be hurt in future battles. Her choice of gift furthermore indicates that she wishes Torrent to continue in an active knightly life. It is more substantial than a pennant or sleeve, yet not as exclusively battle-related as a piece of armour or a weapon. The steed is highly appropriate and also useful: it is a present that Torrent will appreciate both for itself and for the genuine sentiment that inspired it.

Bevis of Hampton incorporates a similar scenario, in which Bevis is given his steed, the exceptionally fast and loyal Arondel, by his lover, Josian, early in the romance. Unlike *Torrent of Portyngale*, however, the horse is not subsequently marginalised or forgotten and acts as more than a one-off love token. Arondel stays with Bevis throughout the rest of the story and becomes almost as important a character as the hero and heroine. Fascinatingly, Bevis's relationship with his horse reflects his relations with Josian, whom he ultimately marries. So, for example, when Bevis is imprisoned, Yvor attempts to claim possession of Arondel and Josian, both of whom dramatically demonstrate their fidelity to the hero. Arondel immediately realises, when Yvor mounts him for the first time, that this is not his master and dashes away with

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[140] *Torrent of Portyngale*, ed. by E. Adam, EETS ES 51 (London: Trübner, 1887), ll. 456-67.

Yvor, eventually throwing him off and seriously injuring him.[141] With difficulty, Arondel is caught and then kept in chains for the next few years, until Bevis returns to free him. Josian, meanwhile, is forced into marriage with Yvor, and is thereby also held against her will, but similarly manages to defy Yvor and preserve her virginity for Bevis by means of a magic ring.

Bevis himself makes the connection between his lover and his horse when he finally escapes from prison and learns of the incident in which Yvor attempted to ride Arondel. He is happy to hear of the horse's loyalty and his reaction is interesting:

> 'Wer Josiane,' a thoughte, 'ase lele,
> Alse is me stede Arondel,
> Yet scholde ich come out of wo!' (2033-5)

At this stage, Bevis is ignorant of Josian's efforts to remain chaste for his sake and it does appear that he has a higher opinion of the horse than the woman. Eventually, however, he will realise that Josian too has unquestionably demonstrated her fidelity and that she and Arondel do have much in common.

Later, Josian fails to recognise the scarred Bevis while Arondel, acting upon a more acute animal instinct, breaks his chains as soon as he hears his master's voice again. Josian, in fact, only knows Bevis once he is upon his horse:

> Beves in to the sadel him threw,
> Tharbi that maide him wel knew. (2179-80)

Bevis's identity is restored and completed when he is reunited with his horse. When the hero does, on one fateful occasion, voluntarily leave Arondel behind in exchange for a supposedly faster, lighter hackney in order to deliver a message to Brademond, it almost results in his death (ll. 1251-61). Ordinarily a messenger could expect safe passage but Bevis unwittingly carries a letter intended to cause him harm. He is tricked twice-over:

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[141] *Bevis of Hampton*, ll. 1507-26. This episode clearly appealed to the English poet who adapted *Bevis* from an Anglo-Norman source, as he expands it significantly. In the Anglo-Norman, Yvor decides to ride Arondel one day but is forcefully kicked in the chest by the animal before he can even mount. By contrast, the Middle English Yvor chooses to ride Arondel in order to make a dramatic entry to his own lands, but is taken instead on a lengthy, and comical, gallop through woods and thorns before finally being thrown off. On the English author's use of his source, see Albert C. Baugh, 'Convention and Individuality in the Middle English Romance', in *Medieval Literature and Folklore Studies. Essays in Honor of Francis Lee Utley*, ed. by Jerome Mandel and Bruce A. Rosenberg (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970), pp. 123-46.

firstly, into taking the letter and, secondly, into leaving behind his faithful horse and sword, so that he is ill-equipped to defend himself. With Arondel, Bevis is invincible; without him, he is seriously weakened and the result is a long period of imprisonment.

The effective martial partnership of Bevis and Arondel is most clearly shown in action when the hero is hugely outnumbered in his final dramatic fight in the streets of London, and Arondel provides him with significant support:

> Ac ever his stede Arondel
> Faste faught with hertte lel,
> That fourty fote behinde and forn
> The folk he hath to grounde iborn. (4447-50)

As we saw above in the incident involving Yvor, Arondel does not merely fight off enemies when under the direct control of Bevis, but is apparently capable of independent thought and action. The horse is a natural fighter and this is demonstrated in an earlier incident when King Edgar's son tries to steal him. As the prince goes to untie Arondel, he is kicked in the head by the horse's hind foot and killed (ll. 3543-64). Arondel is more than just an instrument of the hero, but is clearly seen several times to act on his own initiative. As Baugh comments, 'By his behaviour on numerous occasions he becomes one of the characters of the poem'.[142]

Bevis responds to the human-like qualities of his exceptional steed by treating the animal at times as a person, particularly when he builds a castle to honour Arondel and to celebrate the horse's victory in a race (ll. 3531-42). The hero's behaviour recalls that of Alexander, creating a city as a memorial for his horse. Like Alexander, Bevis displays a sentimental attachment to his horse; he urges Arondel to go faster in the race 'for me loue' (l. 3532) and is later willing to foreswear England in order to save the horse's life when the king, Edgar, wishes to put it to death. It may appear at times that Bevis's true partner in life is his horse. Matters are, however, complicated by the fact that Arondel was originally a gift from Josian to Bevis and therefore also functions as a symbol of her love and constancy throughout the romance. The link between wife and horse is finally confirmed at the conclusion of *Bevis*, when Josian falls seriously ill. A sorrowful Bevis goes out to his stable and there finds Arondel dead. He returns inside

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[142] Baugh, 'Convention and Individuality', p. 130.

where Josian is dying and he himself subsequently dies in her arms (ll. 4596-601). The synchronised deaths of the trio emphasises the close bonds and interdependence that exist between all three.

Again, in *Sir Eglamour,* horses are seen to have an equivalence with women, although there is nothing like the extended comparison that we see in *Bevis.* King Edmund seeks to reward Eglamour for slaying a giant by bestowing his daughter, Organata, upon the hero. Eglamour politely declines and so Edmund settles for giving him a horse instead, a gift that is of much more practical use, particularly since Eglamour's steed was slain in the battle with the giant.[143] The horse is an exceptional animal, with the magical property of protecting its rider from death, and it is clear that Edmund is attempting to offer a substitute of almost equal worth. In the very male world of chivalric knighthood, good horses can be rated as highly as rich heiresses, and each can be traded as gift-objects.

Planche refers to the similarity in the literary treatment of women and horses when she argues that the stereotype of a good horse is quite fixed:

> Le stéréotype du bon cheval se retrouve, esquissé, dans de nombreux textes, à propos d'un cheval dont on définit la valeur. Il n'est pas moins ancré dans les habitudes, et dans l'imaginaire, que celui de la belle dame, du guerrier idéal, ou inversement de la laide pucelle et du mauvais roncin.[144]

Superlative horses are just as much a part of romance as the beautiful damsels and brave knights. The triangle that is formed of knight, lady and horse is not always a comfortable one, however, since they epitomise different types of lifestyle. The horse is representative of the active life and is a clear symbol of mobility and, by extension, adventure. Acquisition of a mistress or wife, by contrast, can signal the end of the knight's questing life as he settles down to rule a kingdom and produce heirs. The conflict is perhaps best dramatised by Chrétien in *Erec et Enide.*[145] When Erec is content to stay at home after his marriage, happy in the company of his wife, his reputation as a knight declines and people talk with regret of how he no longer engages

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[143] *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, Cotton MS, ll. 601-15.
[144] Alice Planche, 'De quelques couleurs de robe. (Le Cheval au Moyen-âge)', in *Le Cheval dans le monde médiéval*, pp. 403-14 (p. 404).
[145] See *Erec et Enide*, ll. 2396-537.

in chivalrous activities. Since he spends a lot of time immobile and no longer jousts or participates in tournaments, it is clear that Erec is no longer spending much time on horseback.

This all dramatically changes when he hears what people have been saying and decides to set out with Enide for a series of adventures. As Erec overcomes opponents along his route, he wins a number of horses, which he gives to Enide to lead. Erec is so successful as a knight that the total rises to eight, which causes Enide problems:

> Del mener est Enide an painne:
> les cinc avocc les trois li baille.[146]
>
> [Enide had difficulty when it came to leading them, the five he gives her with the other three.]

She is an isolated woman, surrounded by a mass of horses but very definitely separated from her husband, who instructs her to ride some distance ahead of him and not to speak to him. The situation is obviously uncomfortable for Enide and highly unusual. At this point, it is clear that Erec has not learnt to balance his knightly life with his marriage, and his wife is almost overcome by the excessive number of horses, which are physical proofs of his chivalric prowess. The horses symbolise male achievement and are in no way compatible with Enide's role as a wife.

Maintaining a sense of equilibrium is always of key importance, and Erec is not the only romance hero to find this problematic. Álvares points out that Gawain is exceptionally loyal to his horse, Gringalet, in romances such as *L'Âtre périlleux* and Chrétien's *Conte du Graal*, in sharp contrast to the number of lovers he has. She argues that 'L'amour du cheval, qu'il ne faut surtout pas perdre alors que la femme est toujours à perdre, est un signe du statisme et du narcissisme de Gauvain'.[147] There is a thin line, however, between obsession on the one hand and a praiseworthy partnership of man and beast on the other.

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[146] *Erec et Enide*, ll. 3040-1.

[147] Cristina Álvares, 'Gauvain, les femmes et le cheval', in *Le Cheval dans le monde médiéval*, pp. 31-41 (p. 39).

Conclusion

Spending long periods of time on horseback is an integral characteristic of knightly life. Unsurprisingly, therefore, some level of affection is often engendered in the rider for his mount: the horse is more than just a mode of transport. That is not to deny that the animal's primary function in romance is obviously as an agent of movement. Aguiriano makes the following assessment of the horse's role and its relation to space:

> On peut dire donc que le cheval est le trait d'union entre l'ici et l'au-delà. Souvent le fait de monter est le seul élément qui situe la narration dans un espace autre, sans que la description du mouvement soit nécessaire; comme si le fait de monter 'à cheval' était un acte magique capable de transformer l'entourage, ou, pour mieux dire, capable de situer le héros dans un espace de transformation.[148]

The horse has much in common with the ship of romance, as we shall see in the following chapter, when it acts in this facilitating manner and enables characters to be swiftly resituated to suit the contingencies of the plot. Both horse and ship can be used as narrative devices that eliminate the empty space in-between the designated loci where adventures and action are going to occur. The notion of a journey can be evoked simply by a brief reference to a character mounting a horse or entering a ship.

It is evident, however, that the horse often becomes the focus of attention itself, and may be important either in its own right (sometimes developing status similar to a human character) or for what it indicates about its owner. As Cohen observes, 'A horse under the complete control of its rider was the public signifier of a knight's internalized discipline, of his self-mastery'.[149] Equally, poor horsemanship or a disrespectful attitude to horses can signify far less worthy qualities. Mounting a horse in one leap from the ground, without use of the stirrups, is a typical action of many a romance knight-hero and is indicative of his virility and athleticism.[150] It is interesting to note

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[148] Begona Aguiriano, 'Le cheval et le depart en aventure dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes', in *Le Cheval dans le monde médiéval*, pp. 11-27 (p. 26).

[149] Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, p. 59.

[150] The motif of the stirrup-less jump occurs widely in many different European languages but, as Otto Springer argues, is a characteristic of popular rather than courtly romance, where it 'is shunned as a feature not compatible with the ideal of courtly etiquette and its poetic description'. By contrast, in refined courtly literature, the use of the stirrup demonstrates good breeding. See Springer, 'The "Âne Stegreif" Motif in Medieval Literature', *The Germanic Review*, 25 (1950), 163-77 (p. 176). For examples of the motif, see *Le Chevalier à l'épée*, in *Two Old French Gauvain Romances*, ed. by R.C. Johnston and

that this feat is not as implausible as it may initially seem. Contamine points out that Marshal Boucicaut was renowned for his martial athleticism, and one account tells how he 'leapt onto a courser without placing his foot in the stirrup, fully armed.'[151]

Horses are also used as a form of noble currency and a fine charger may be as desirable for a knight as a beautiful lady. As we have seen, many common romance topoi are centred around horses and their behaviour, and the animal lends a fascinating range of possibilities to the romance author. Even though romances may focus less attention than epic upon horses in terms of naming and describing individual mounts, the animal is still an indispensable feature of any romance, whether it is taken for granted or foregrounded. In addition to being purely functional transport, the horse can inspire a wide range of emotions, including desire, affection, loyalty and hatred and, above all, retains its central symbolic significance as the essential partner of an active knight.

D.D.R. Owen (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1972), ll. 1152-3; Renaut de Beaujeu, *Le Bel Inconnu*, ed. by G. Perrie Williams, CFMA 38 (Paris: Champion, 1929), ll. 511-14 and 1049-50; and *Bevis of Hampton*, ll. 1944-6.

[151] Philippe Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Michael Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), p. 216; Contamine is citing *Le Livre des faicts du bon messire Jean le Maingre, dit Boucicaut, marechal de France et gouverneur de Gennes.*

Chapter Two: Romances, the Sea and Travel by Boat

It was widely accepted in the Middle Ages that voyages over water were inherently unpredictable. Great advances in boat-building continued to be made throughout the period, resulting in more manoeuvrable and stable ships and better navigational systems, yet the weather and sea conditions remained a constant threat. At sea, fortunes can change in an instant with the sudden arrival of a storm, a notion particularly in keeping with the 'Wheel of Fortune' image that was extremely popular with medieval writers. There is a great deal of sea and storm imagery employed throughout Boethius's influential sixth-century *Consolatio Philosophiae*, to convey ideas of the inconstancy of life and man's powerlessness in the face of change. Fortune, for example, is depicted in action in the following terms:

> Haec cum superba verterit vices dextra
> et aestuantis more fertur Euripi.
>
> [With domineering hand she moves the turning wheel,
> Like currents in a treacherous bay swept to and fro.] [152]

Again, when the narrator is urged to be more thankful for the happiness he still possesses, the same imagery is used:

> nondum est ad unum omnes exosa fortuna nec tibi nimium valida tempestas incubuit, quando tenaces haerent ancorae, quae nec praesentis solamen nec futuri spem temporis abesse patiantur.[153]
>
> [Fortune has not yet turned her hatred against all your blessings. The storm has not yet broken upon you with too much violence. Your anchors are holding firm and they permit you both comfort in the present, and hope in the future.]

Sea travel would thus seem to have a lot to recommend it to the medieval romance author who wished to make a point about reversals of fortune. It also opens up a number of literary possibilities. A storm, for instance, can readily be exploited as a simple device to change, quite literally, the direction of a narrative.

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[152] Boethius, *Consolatio Philosophiae*, ed. by James J. O'Donnell (Bryn Mawr, PA: Bryn Mawr Latin Commentaries, 1984), p. 22. The translation is that of V.E. Watts in *The Consolation of Philosophy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).
[153] *Consolatio Philosophiae*, pp. 28-9.

A number of romances, such as those retelling the Tristan legend, do feature journeys by sea very prominently.[154] In so doing, they follow in the tradition of stories like *Apollonius of Tyre*, a tale that is entirely structured around a series of voyages. As such it is typical of Greek romance, which was doubtless influenced by the island geography of Greece itself. The Latin *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri* was composed in Italy in the late fifth or early sixth century but is most likely an adaptation of a Greek original dating from the second or third century. It retained its popularity throughout the medieval period – with at least two English versions being written in the fourteenth century, including one by Gower – and would have been known to writers of romance in both France and England. Elizabeth Archibald comments that 'Apollonius was no role model for writers interested in lovers or jousters, though some versions did invent battles for him to fight'.[155] However, even though the straightforward hero-type of a seafaring wanderer held little appeal for the authors of medieval romance, many romances do adopt certain elements that can be traced back to stories similar to that of Apollonius.

By contrast with Greek romance, writers of chivalric romance are generally seen as being intrinsically uninterested in sea travel since, as Cooper claims,

> Journeys in romance are usually intimately related to questing, to the knight in pursuit of chivalric prowess: the very etymology of 'chivalry', courtly French for horsemanship, would seem to preclude ship travel except as a means of getting to or from an island, or travelling between widely separated lands – a blank space between adventures, which the knight will encounter only when he comes ashore.[156]

As this chapter will prove, some romances – often inspired by earlier story types that focussed more on sea travel – nonetheless did develop the voyaging element of their tale so that there are numerous examples of the sea functioning not as a blank space but as a stage for significant dramatic action. Romances vary greatly in their treatment of the

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[154] From oral origins, the Tristan story first appeared in verse romances in Anglo-Norman and German in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The sources of the legend are unclear; for a discussion of the possibility of Celtic and/or Oriental influences, see W.J. McCann, 'Tristan: The Celtic and Oriental Material Re-examined,' in *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook*, ed. by Joan Tasker Grimbert (London: Garland, 1995), pp. 3-35.

[155] Elizabeth Archibald, *Apollonius of Tyre. Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991), p. 62.

[156] Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 111.

sea. In one instance, a voyage may be swift and direct, completed without incident. Upon another occasion, though, journeying by sea becomes the trigger for a whole range of literary possibilities, from the inception of Tristrem and Ysonde's ill-fated love to shipwreck and death. The sea – and ships – provide a class of setting that is quite unlike the other more stable and stationary set-pieces of romance like the castle, meadow and forest. The entire nature of the sea can change in an instant with the introduction of a storm or tempest and then calm just as quickly: this inconstancy is its primary characteristic.

Often, superstition arises from this unpredictability; it is a coping strategy for man whose natural impulse is to seek reason and meaning even where there is none. A sudden storm or becalming can be reinterpreted as the deliberate act of a god, a reaction to the (mis)behaviour of people on board the stricken ship. In medieval romance, the popular motif of the rudderless boat also exemplifies this attitude. Individuals are set adrift, usually with no means of propulsion or steering, but are subsequently shown to have been placed into the hands of God, who unfailingly saves the righteous by guiding the vessel safely to land.

It is very common for women (or even the hero as a young child) to suffer trials at sea, and the Constance-type of woman set adrift in a rudderless boat is a recurring literary figure.[157] It is far less usual though for a male adult to be portrayed drifting helplessly on the ocean. Apollonius of Tyre and the eponymous hero of *Huon of Burdeux* are rare examples of men who are subjected to multiple storms and shipwrecks. Helen Cooper remarks that 'Exposure at sea constitutes a *iudicium Dei*, a judgement made not by men but by God; it is a marine equivalent of the testing of right in chivalric combat'.[158] There is some truth in this comparison but, importantly, even the best knight cannot influence the outcome if he is thrown into a rudderless boat – except perhaps by prayer. While a knight can often 'prove' a lie to be truth by overcoming his

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[157] On the topos of the rudderless boat see, in particular, Cooper, *The English Romance*, pp. 106-36; V.A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (London: Arnold, 1984), pp. 297-358; and J.R. Reinhard, 'Setting Adrift in Medieval Law and Literature', *PMLA*, 56 (1941), 33-68.

[158] Cooper, *The English Romance*, p. 110.

opponent in a judicial duel, at sea the destiny of an individual is entirely in the hands of God or fate.

Jill Mann has argued that the differing presentations of sea travel in epic and romance serve as a useful index of the contrast between what she sees as two distinct models of heroism. In the epic – Mann gives *Beowulf* as an example – the sea is a road, merely something to be navigated in order to reach a specific desired goal. In romance, by contrast, when the hero(ine) goes to sea s/he is usually at its mercy '... set adrift in a rudderless boat, allowing its winds and currents to set his course, challenged and thwarted by its storms'.[159] The romance hero(ine) is required to submit, a difficult thing to do in a situation of peril. Although it is most likely to be a woman that we find in a rudderless boat, the enchanted boats of romance provide a near-equivalence for male heroes.[160] The knight conveyed by such a magic vessel seldom has any control over its movement.

At first glance this powerlessness appears contrary to the usual emphasis of romance on the superlative prowess of the knight-hero, which allows him to overcome any opponent or obstacle. Yet travelling by boat is simply another way in which the knight takes the 'aventure' that comes to him and is essentially a variation on the act of riding off into a forest in order to seek a challenge. It is, however, clear that, like rudderless boats, magical ships fit into the landscape of romance but not that of epic. As Bloomfield asserts,

> Man is more naked and exposed in the romances than in the epics; he is in a liminal situation where the unknown hovers threateningly over him. He is in need of Christianity and of the merciful powers. He cannot rely on his own strength or on the rationality of the world as the epic hero can.[161]

Therefore, although many epics do include sea crossings, these journeys are generally simply an uncomplicated and uneventful means to an end.

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[159] Jill Mann, 'Sir Gawain and the Romance Hero', in *Heroes and Heroines in Medieval English Literature Presented to André Crépin*, ed. by Leo Carruthers (Cambridge: Brewer, 1994), pp. 105-17 (p. 107).

[160] While the topos of the rudderless boat most frequently has a female or child protagonist, the enchanted boat of romance is used almost exclusively to transport male characters. Marie de France's *Guigemar* contains a significant exception, and will be further discussed below.

[161] Morton W. Bloomfield, *Essays and Explorations: Studies in Ideas, Language, and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 112.

It might be reasonable to suppose that the *chansons de geste*, or other works with a focus on conquest and crusade, would take more than a passing interest in travel by ship. While real life conquest and crusades may have introduced new ship-building techniques and different types of vessel to western Europe, along with additions to maritime terminology, the literature actually features little in the way of detailed descriptions of voyages. Upon occasion rich fleets are depicted, and ornate warships are particularly associated with heathen rulers. Thiébaut, for example, king of Arabia, travels in a striking vessel in *Les Enfances Guillaume*, a *chanson de geste* written between 1205 and 1250.[162] His superior ship, at the head of a magnificent fleet, makes a dramatic statement about his power and standing. The ship strongly displays Thiébaut's allegiance to Mohammed and instantly conveys the impression that the Arabian king has an abundance of wealth and exotic riches. Aside from such exaggerated passages of description, however, Campbell comments that the references to the sea in *chansons de geste* are numerous but often just short and formulaic.[163] Journeys over the sea are such an everyday commonplace that they warrant little special attention in the eyes of the authors of crusading tales.

Travel by ship in fact plays a much more significant part in the romance corpus than in its epic predecessors. Although numerous critics have shown interest in the topos of setting a (usually innocent) character adrift in a boat with no means of propulsion or navigation, little attention has been paid to how this fits with the other, varied instances of travel over water specifically in romance.[164] The seascape of medieval romance does not merely appear when the hero or heroine is thrown upon the mercy of God and the waves in an unseaworthy boat. The sea also provides the

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[162] See *Les Enfances Guillaume*, ed. by Patrice Henry (Paris: Champion, 1935), ll. 222-38.

[163] Kimberlee A. Campbell, 'En haute mer: navire et marin dans la chanson de geste', in *Ce nous dist li escris ... Che est la verite* (*Sénéfiance*, 45), ed. by Miren Lacassagne (Aix-en-Provence: CUER MA, Université de Provence, 2000), pp. 35-49 (pp. 36-7).

[164] There are a number of studies that do include some analysis of a broader range of sea-related topoi, but these mostly deal with a much wider selection of literary sources than medieval romance alone. See, for example, Peter and Ursula Dronke, *Growth of Literature: The Sea and the God of the Sea*, H.M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures 8 (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, 1998); Anne Treneer, *The Sea in English Literature from 'Beowulf' to Donne* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 1926); Titus Heydenreich, *Tadel und Lob der Seefahrt. Das Nachleben eines antiken Themas in den romanischen Literaturen* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1970); and Albrecht Classen, 'Storms, Sea Crossings, the Challenges of Nature, and the Transformation of the Protagonist in Medieval and Renaissance Literature', *Neohelicon*, 30 (2003), 163-82.

backdrop for many examples of enchanted ships, shipwrecks, surprise attacks and swift getaways, not to mention the many more mundane sea crossings of armies or individuals seeking war, adventure or service with a foreign ruler. There are four main categories into which the vessels of romance characteristically fall:

i. those afflicted by storm and shipwreck,

ii. those that feature in motifs of setting adrift,

iii. enchanted ships, and

iv. boats for the dead.

These categories are by no means mutually exclusive but will provide a useful framework for this chapter in its exploration of the role of ships and boats in medieval romance.

In addition, it seems helpful to examine the important underlying issues, such as beliefs, superstitions and attitudes relating to the sea, compared and contrasted with what we know about the reality of maritime travel in the Middle Ages. The literary conceptions of the sea and sea travel are not intrinsically medieval but have much older roots. While it is not my intention here to produce a detailed study of the sources of the recurrent marine motifs of medieval romance, I do hope to indicate some of the key elements of thought that run through Old French and Middle English texts from classical literature, the Bible and other ancient sources.

Storms and Sinners

I wish to begin by looking at what is without a doubt the central motif of stories of seafaring throughout the ages: the storm. Storms are the greatest danger faced when going to sea and are a real, frequently-occurring, phenomenon which can be introduced as and when is convenient in a literary narrative without appearing overly unrealistic. Many medieval romances feature storms and shipwrecks – not necessarily as major dramatic events but nonetheless significant as components within the larger structure of the work.

From ancient times, popular superstition has interpreted storms not as chance or random occurrences but as specific responses to human actions. For Christians, the

Book of Jonah provides the most famous example, the influence of which can be traced in a wide range of later literature.[165] Jonah, wishing to disregard God's command, makes a futile attempt to sail out of His reach. A violent storm arises and, as the ship is in danger of breaking up, the sailors cast lots to discover who is to blame and Jonah is singled out. The sailors assume – quite rightly in this case – that the storm is not simply a chance misfortune but is directly linked to an individual on board. Jonah admits his guilt and is thrown overboard. The sailors ask God to absolve them of responsibility for what they assume will be Jonah's death, 'for all this, Lord, is what you yourself have brought about' (Jonah 1. 14). Once Jonah is cast from the ship, the sea immediately calms, thereby underlining the fact that the storm was a direct consequence of Jonah's wrongdoing.

This biblical episode was probably itself influenced by longstanding popular traditions and would then serve, in its turn, to encourage future generations to see storms as a form of divine (re)action. Several romances illustrate that this belief still had currency in the Middle Ages, amongst them *Huon of Burdeux*, in which God's displeasure is immediately felt when the hero blatantly ignores Oberon's warning and has sexual relations with Esclaramonde before their marriage. The divine response to Huon's sin is dramatically swift:

> ... he had no sonner accomplyshyd his wyll / but there rose suche a meruelous tempest / that the wawes of the see semyd so greate and hye as mounteyns / and therwith it blew and thonderyd and lyghtenyd that it was ferefull to beholde the see / and the shyppe was so sore tormentyd / that the shyppe brast all to peces, so that there abode but one pece of tymbre where apon Huon and the lady was... .[166]

There is no doubt in this instance that the shipwreck is the direct result of Huon's disobedient actions and that instant punishment has been dispensed.

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[165] See Jonah 1. 7-15. For an example of the influence of the tale of Jonah see the Scottish ballad, *Bonnie Annie*, which describes how Annie steals from her parents before eloping with her lover. Events then follow that are heavily influenced by the biblical story. A storm arises while Annie is at sea and, when the sailors cast lots, blame falls on her. Annie admits her wrongdoing and asks to be thrown overboard. See *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, ed. by Francis James Child, 5 vols (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1882-98), I, 244-6.

[166] *The Boke of Duke Huon of Burdeux*, ed. by S.L. Lee, EETS ES 40, 41, 43, 50 (London: Trübner, 1882-7), p. 156.

Concomitantly, turbulent seas and high winds in literary works can also connote positive celestial action. In the late fourteenth-century *Siege of Jerusalem*, Nathan is driven off course by a storm that is a means of divine intervention:

> So þe wedour and þe wynd on þe water metyn
> Þat alle hurled on an hepe þat þe helm ȝemyd.
>
> Nathan flatte for ferde and ful vnder hacchys,
> Lete þe wedour and þe wynde wor[ch]e as h[em] lyked.[167]

Nathan completely loses control of the ship and is directed by God to a new destination, Bordeaux, where he is able to perform God's will by effecting the conversion of Titus. Kölbing and Day remark:

> There is a certain parallelism between Jonah and Nathan. Each is going on a sea-journey with a certain object, each is deflected by a storm from that object that he may be the messenger of God.[168]

The sea's uncontrollable nature may well pose a threat to man, leaving him at the mercy of the unpredictable elements, but sometimes a storm or prevailing wind can be providential. This is further demonstrated in both *Huon of Burdeux* and Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte du Graal*. In the former, Huon is trapped in the strong castle of Anfalerne and his enemies are confident that he will be unable to hold out for long:

> ... ye know well these frenchemen are as a byrde beynge in a cage / for they can not scape nother by londe nor water, & they are without hope of any rescue. To daye they were xiiii, and now they be but xiii ye are lodgyd in a good towne, & haue the feldes and the see at your pleasure / it is not possyble for them to escape / they haue nother ship nor galay to flye in / syr, apeace your selfe; suffer them to wast theyr vytaylles.[169]

Huon's besiegers fail, however, to allow for the potential of the sea as an outlet. Although Huon and his companions have no ship or boat, the castle in which they are trapped has access to the sea and a ship arrives there, after having been driven off course by a terrible storm. By an unlikely coincidence, the vessel is not only Christian but also under the command of the brother of one of Huon's companions. Due to the

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[167] *The Siege of Jerusalem*, ed. by Ralph Hanna and David Lawton, EETS 320 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), ll. 63-6. It has been noted, by Kölbing and Day amongst others, that the description of the storm closely resembles, and may have influenced or been influenced by, that in *Patience*. See the introduction to *The Siege of Jerusalem*, ed. by E. Kölbing and Mabel Day, EETS 188 (London: Oxford University Press, 1932) p. xxix-xxx.
[168] Introduction to *The Siege of Jerusalem*, ed. by Kölbing and Day, p. xxx.
[169] *Huon of Burdeux*, p. 207.

sheltered nature of the port, it both arrives, and later departs (with Huon and his men), without attracting the notice of the besieging forces.

Similarly, in the *Conte du Graal*, the besieged town of Beaurepaire is saved from starvation by the opportune arrival in its harbour of a boat:

> Cel jor meïsme[s] .i. grans vens
> Ot par mer chachie une barge,
> Qui de forment portoit grant carge
> Et d'autre vitaille estoit plaine;
> Si com Dieu plot, entiere et saine
> Fu devant le chastel venue.
>
> [That very day a gale had driven across the sea a boat carrying a large cargo of wheat and full of other provisions. By God's will it had arrived safe and undamaged before the castle.][170]

The merchant ship is full of bread, wine, salted bacon and livestock which are eagerly purchased by the citizens of Beaurepaire.[171] This windfall of supplies greatly frustrates Clamadeu in his attempt to take the town; he realises that his siege has been in vain and is obliged to seek a different way of winning the place, through single combat. Beaurepaire's survival is highly providential, as was Huon's escape from Anfalerne. In each case, the ship of salvation is driven off course by a storm to the place where it brings relief, as if directed by the hand of God.

The sea, and travel upon it, seem particularly to inspire religious belief and also superstition. Naturally, thoughts of God were likely to come to the forefront of a person's mind when the ship was in trouble and those on board feared for their lives. Storms represent a power to which man is unequal and even the best prepared ships are at the mercy of an especially violent storm or a headwind blowing them towards a rocky coastline. It was still easy in the Middle Ages to get lost by being blown off course, as Huon discovers on more than one occasion,[172] even though the mariner's compass was available by the late twelfth century. The fifteenth century brought further advancements in navigational aids, such as the sand-glass, improved astrolabes, charts

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[170] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Roman de Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal*, ed. by Keith Busby (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993), ll. 2524-9. All translations of Chrétien's romances are based, with minor modifications, on Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. by D.D.R. Owen (London: Dent, 1993).

[171] The episode is reminiscent of the Apollonius story, in which the hero flees to Tarsus and saves the city from famine by distributing the ship-loads of grain he has brought with him.

[172] See, for example, *Huon of Burdeux*, pp. 357-60.

and quadrants, but 'nevertheless, vessels still sailed from the vicinity of one known landmark to the next, and the course was frequently referred to as "caping the ship"'.[173] A violent storm might readily cause the mariner to lose his bearings altogether.

Medieval authors frequently base elements of their work on shared assumptions about Christian beliefs and popular superstitions. Despite this, the very simple theme of the sinner who suffers divine retribution through a storm at sea is not one that appears frequently in literature such as romance, even though Jonah's archetypal experiences would clearly have been very well-known. Often, however, common beliefs are projected onto characters in a romance and then dramatic events are played out based on these characters' assumptions. Marie de France, for example, in *Eliduc* creates a dramatic episode out of the superstition that God will not tolerate a sinner at sea. In this case, things are not so clear-cut as in the story of Jonah, and the sailors wrongly apportion blame in what appears to be a desperate attempt to save their own skins. The incident is triggered when Eliduc secretly takes his lover, Guilliadun, away with him by ship, and the vessel is struck by a terrifying storm that breaks the mast and tears the sails into shreds. As they come close to shipwreck one of the sailors cries out:

> ... Quei faimes nus?
> Sire, ça einz avez od vus
> Cele par ki nus perissums.
> Jamés a tere ne vendrums!
> Femme leale espuse avez
> E sur celë autre en menez
> Cuntre Deu e cuntre la lei,
> Cuntre dreiture e cuntre fei.
> Lessez la nus geter en mer,
> Si poüm sempres ariver.
>
> [What are we doing? Lord, you have with you the woman who will cause us to perish. We shall never make land! You have a loyal wife and now with this other woman you offend God and His law, righteousness and the faith. Let us cast her into the sea and we shall soon arrive safely.][174]

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[173] Seán McGrail, *Boats of the World from the Stone Age to Medieval Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 247. Gillian Hutchinson, however, adds: 'It must be emphasised that the idea that medieval ships "hugged the coast" is a misconception. There was sometimes coastwise sailing but the risk of being driven onto a lee shore meant that ships stood well out to sea to avoid danger.' *Medieval Ships and Shipping* (London: Leicester University Press, 1994), p. 165.

[174] *Eliduc* in Marie de France, *Lais*, ed. by Alfred Ewert and Glyn S. Burgess (London: Bristol Classical, 1995), ll. 831-40. All translations of Marie's *lais* are those of Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby in *The Lais of Marie de France*, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), p. 45.

It is telling that even though Guilliadun is innocent, being up to this point utterly ignorant of the fact that her beloved Eliduc is already married to another woman, it is she who is made the scapegoat rather than the far more culpable Eliduc. The sailor's misogyny is merely another aspect of his primitive view of life.[175] This incident could have been attributed simply to natural adverse sea conditions, but the sailor immediately reads more into it and seeks rationalisation and someone to blame. Many superstitions arose amongst sailors as a strategy for coping with the dangers of putting to sea. As Campbell states: 'Bref, l'homme face à cet environnement brutal devenait à son tour sauvage et impitoyable.'[176]

Marie de France makes use of the popular superstition without condoning it. The storm in *Eliduc* is somewhat ambiguous – it does initially appear that Marie is employing the familiar motif and that the storm has arisen as a condemnation of the married hero's wrongful elopement with his new lover. This possibility is, however, then voiced by the superstitious sailor who wishes to throw Guilliadun overboard in order to appease the storm. His views are thoroughly discredited as, ironically, it is he who ends up being pushed from the boat and drowned by Eliduc, who then steers the boat safely to shore with little apparent difficulty. After all, the storm seems merely to have been a chance phenomenon whose purpose in Marie's narrative is to bring about the revelation that Eliduc is a married man: a disclosure that shocks Guilliadun into a death-like trance.

The author of the Middle English *Sir Tristrem* similarly illustrates the superstitions of sailors and the deeply-held belief that storms are evidence that someone on board has offended God. In this text, however, it is not an individual who has sinned but the entire crew, since they have wrongfully abducted the young Tristrem. The narrator describes the troubled voyage in the following terms:

> Niyen woukes and mare
> The mariners flet on flod
> Til anker hem brast and are
> And stormes hem bistode.

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[175] On the notion of the victim as scapegoat and the deeply primitive nature of such systems of belief see René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. by Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

[176] Campbell, 'En haute mer', p. 47.

Her sorwen and her care
Thai witt that frely fode;
Thai nisten hou to fare,
The wawes were so wode
With winde.
O lond thai wold he yede
Yif thai wist ani to finde.[177]

The sailors blame Tristrem's presence on board for the storm and so immediately aim to put him ashore. The text neither confirms nor denies that the storm is indeed the result of the sailors' wrongdoing and this point is largely irrelevant. What is important is that the sailors fully subscribe to the ancient tradition of seeking a reason for a particularly bad storm. They require no further proof but are at once convinced that Tristrem is the cause of their misfortune.

Control over the seas is certainly not restricted to the Christian God in medieval literature; the theme is also still applied to pagan gods. This is, unsurprisingly, most commonly found in works like the *Roman d'Eneas* – a French adaptation of Virgil's *Aeneid* composed around 1150 – which are directly linked to classical sources such as the writings of Virgil and Homer. The foundational Greek and Latin epics often place great emphasis upon the relations between human characters and the pre-Christian gods. The balance of power becomes starkly evident at sea, where man is at his most vulnerable and almost entirely dependent upon the good will of the gods.

In the *Eneas*, the hero and his companions are subjected to seven years of harsh troubles at sea, culminating in a violent tempest that destroys one of the ships in their fleet.[178] The suffering is so great that Eneas wishes he had been killed in the battle at Troy instead. All this hardship is revealed as being deliberately inflicted by Juno,

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[177] *'Lancelot of the Laik' and 'Sir Tristrem'*, ed. by Alan Lupack (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1994), ll. 364-74. This early episode does not survive in the fragments that remain to us of *Sir Tristrem's* source, the Anglo-Norman *Tristran* by Thomas (written around 1170). Similar versions of the episode can, however, be found in the Norwegian *Tristrams Saga* (1226) and the Middle High German *Tristan und Îsolt* (c. 1210) of Gottfried von Strassburg - both of which used Thomas as source - so it is therefore reasonable to conclude that the episode originated in Thomas's *Tristran*. See *The Saga of Tristram and Ísönd*, trans. by Paul Schach (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), pp. 21-4; and Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, trans. by A.T. Hatto (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960; repr. 1970), pp. 70-4.

[178] *Eneas*, ed. by Jacques Salverda de Grave (Halle: Niemeyer, 1891), ll. 210-41.

goddess of the sky. She hates the Trojans as a result of the earlier judgement of Paris, who chose Venus over her as possessing the greater beauty.

In Lydgate's *Troy Book*, the pagan deities can similarly be seen to use their power upon occasion in a vengeful way. As the Greeks sail home after the fall of Troy, all appears to be going well until they are hit by a very sudden and unexpected storm:

> For whan Grekis effectuously best wene
> In her passage fully assured be
> Vp-on þe se þat called was Egee,
> Þis false goddesse he[m] anoon forsoke;
> And Boreas, þe felle wynde, a-woke,
> And with his hidous dredful noise & soun
> He turned al her quiete vp-so-doun,
> And made þe wowes grisly to arise.[179]

The terrible conditions are explained as the goddess Minerva's punishment of the Greeks for the lack of reverence shown to her. It is evidently most inadvisable to incur the wrath of the gods.

Mysterious interventions by divine powers appear so habitually in medieval literature that they can be merely suggested and not subsequently rationalised. Gower, in the *Confessio Amantis*, retells the Apollonius story and makes an interesting addition to it that offers further evidence that motifs of God (or gods) either directing or approving human actions through the medium of the weather and sea conditions were widely used in the literature of this period. In the *Confessio Amantis*, Apollonius has a dream telling him to go to Ephesus, like the hero of the *Historia Apollonii*. Unlike the Latin Apollonius, however, Gower's hero does not act solely upon the 'evidence' of the dream but, the following day,

> The wynd, which was tofore strange
> Upon the point began to change,
> And torneth thider as it scholde.
> Tho knew he wel that god it wolde... .[180]

The timely change in wind conditions reassures Apollonius of the veracity of his dream's message and convinces him to head for Ephesus. Divine powers can thus be

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[179] *Lydgate's Troy Book*, ed. by Henry Bergen, 4 vols, EETS ES 97, 103, 106 & 126 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1906-35), II (1908), Book 5, ll. 636-43.

[180] The *Confessio Amantis* in *The English Works of John Gower, Volume 2*, ed. by G.C. Macaulay, EETS ES 82 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1901; repr. 1957), Book 8, ll. 1807-10.

shown as intervening in human stories in a quite subtle way, acting through the natural elements to confirm that the right course of action is being undertaken.

Elsewhere, some romances take this age-old idea of the superstitious belief in the workings of some higher power and use it in a more ambiguous way. Thus, in the early fourteenth-century romance *Richard Coer de Lyon* a strange force does seem to be at work, although events are not specifically attributed to God. When King Henry declares that he will only marry the fairest woman alive, messengers are sent out in ships to perform the difficult search. While the voyage initially goes smoothly,

> Whenne þey come on mydde þe see,
> No wynd oneþe hadden hee;
> Þerfore hem was swyþe woo.[181]

Henry's messengers are becalmed, unable to progress in any direction. It is at this very moment, however, that they catch sight of another ship, on board which is Cassodorien, the beautiful princess who is destined to become Henry's wife. As the two ships make contact, Cassodorien's father tells the messengers that he is travelling to England with his daughter after experiencing a vision instructing him to do so. Bernager, one of Henry's men, swiftly proclaims an end to their search and announces that they will bring Cassodorien to Henry. Just as he says this,

> Þe wynd aros out off þe norþeste,
> And seruede hem ri3t wiþ þe beste.[182]

The favourable wind appears to confirm the choice and has, in fact, assisted the mission throughout. Nature's uncanny intervention is perhaps connected with the mysterious character of Cassodorien, although this link is never made explicit.[183]

The influential role played here by the wind (and absence of wind) recalls the conclusion of Thomas's *Tristran.*[184] In it, too, the weather conditions are crucially important but, by contrast, lead to tragic consequences when Yseut is first held up by a

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[181] *Der Mittelenglische versroman über Richard Löwenherz*, ed. by Karl Brunner (Vienna and Leipzig: Braumüller, 1913), ll. 57-9.
[182] *Richard*, ll. 131-2.
[183] Cassodorien, although outwardly a conventionally idealised noblewoman, does also have a quasi-demonic aspect. She cannot bear to witness the sacrament and when, many years later, she is forced to stay at a service, she flies up through the roof with her daughter and is never seen or heard of again.
[184] Thomas of Britain, *Tristran*, ed. and trans. by Stewart Gregory (London: Garland, 1991), ll. 2861-2986.

contrary wind and violent five-day storm and then becalmed, tantalisingly just out of reach of her destination. She and her crew are powerless to make any headway, despite her desperate wish to reach the injured Tristran before he dies, believing her to have abandoned him. The wind rises again only after the other Yseut, Tristran's wife, has falsely told the hero that she has seen the ship that he sent to Cornwall returning with a black sail (an indication that his beloved Yseut is not on board). Yseut comes safely to shore not long afterwards, but only to find that Tristran has died of grief. The narrator here, unlike in many of the later romances, makes no attempt to justify or explain the tragedy caused by the unfortunate changing wind and weather conditions: he simply manages to convey powerfully the lack of control that the protagonists have over their own destiny.

Supernatural Aspects of the Sea and its Literary Potential

The popular superstitions surrounding the sea permeate medieval texts and are clearly an ancient part of the culture of seafaring. In an age, too, in which accounts of sea monsters were often supposed factual[185] and much of the world was unmapped, it was easy for the literary imagination to create a seascape with a decidedly otherworldly atmosphere. Jill Tattersall adds that

> Isolated from the continents by shapeless, often nameless seas, an island was a natural setting for an adventure or a fanciful interlude in a story, and it could at will be made the home of strange inhabitants or customs, of magical or mysterious phenomena.[186]

The sea is an unquantifiable place where the line between fantasy and truth blurs. Romance writers can turn this to their advantage in order to move a story on or to initiate new adventures, and ships are a simple means of bringing things of unexplained origin into a tale. The author need not elaborate on the source of such mysterious elements, as the sea is a place commonly accepted to be of sufficient mystery to harbour all kinds of inexplicable marvels.

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[185] As an example, see the account of the attacks on Britain of a formidable sea monster described by Wace in *Wace's Roman de Brut: A History of the British*, ed. by Judith Weiss (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), ll. 3419-55.

[186] Jill Tattersall, 'The Island and its Significance in Old French Texts of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', *French Studies*, 34 (1980), 1-11 (p. 9).

It is by such means that Jehan introduces the otherworldly monks into *Les Mervelles de Rigomer*, his late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century romance. Arthur's knights are enjoying the upper hand over their Irish opponents in a large-scale tournament just outside Rigomer, and succeed in driving the Irish back onto an enchanted heath. This is the trigger, however, for the sudden arrival of two ships full of strange and silent devilish monks, who are fully armed beneath their robes and enter into the fray on the side of the Irish. It takes the British knights some time before they realise that the only way to kill this bizarre enemy is to strip each monk of his hood – otherwise they are invulnerable to all weapons.[187] The origin of these fantastic monks is never explained; once defeated they are never heard of again. The reader can speculate that they perhaps came out of hell's mouth itself, which was sometimes mythically situated far out at sea.[188]

Romances give the impression that the sea is a place of limitless potential and, as such, certainly capable of supplying many narrative solutions. Later on in *Les Mervelles de Rigomer* the narrator marvels at the lavish number of servants that Gauvain is able to supply for a banquet, so great that 'Con s'en le mer le puisast hom' [it seemed as though they had been fetched from the sea].[189] This comment clearly indicates some of the author's perceptions of the sea, and how it can be used in literature; it is a vast space comprising an inexhaustible source of wonders.

The sea can be used to explain away the origins of mysterious story elements, as is the case in the fourteenth-century *Sir Amadace*. When the enigmatic White Knight promises Amadace riches and tells him of a lady he can then win by jousting, he instructs the hero to explain the fact that he is a wealthy man travelling alone in the following terms:

> Thou say the menne that come with the,
> That they were drounet on the see,
> With wild waturs slone.[190]

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[187] See *Les Mervelles de Rigomer von Jehan*, ed. by Wendelin Foerster (Dresden: Niemeyer, 1908), ll. 10,249-10,405.

[188] See, for example, *Huon of Burdeux*, pp. 362-3, where Huon's ship only narrowly misses being drawn into 'one of the Goulfes of hel'.

[189] *Rigomer*, l. 13,352. Translations are taken from *The Marvels of Rigomer*, trans. by Thomas E. Vesce (London: Garland, 1988).

[190] *Sir Amadace* in *Six Middle English Romances*, ed. by Maldwyn Mills (London: Dent, 1992), ll. 475-7.

At this stage, the White Knight has produced none of the promised riches, but as Amadace approaches the seashore, he finds his fortune in a shipwreck:

> The broken schippus he ther fonde,
> Hit were mervayl to say.
> He fond wrekun amung the stones
> Knyghtes in menevere for the nones,
> Stedes quite and gray;
> With all kynne maner of richus
> That any mon myghte devise,
> Castun uppe with waturs lay.
> Kistes and cofurs bothe ther stode,
> Was fulle of gold precius and gode,
> No mon bare noghte away.[191]

Although Amadace's experiences are certainly marvellous, the source of his good fortune is partially rationalised. The riches do not quite appear from nowhere, but materialise mysteriously, it seems, from the depths of the sea, in the form of a highly fortuitous shipwreck. Even though Amadace has not actually been involved in the shipwreck, the evidence is there to support the role that he assumes of sole survivor. The White Knight's fiction understandably rings true to all whom Amadace encounters from then on, supported as it is by the visible 'proof' of the wreck.

It is easy to make a convincing fiction that depends on the sea. Jean Verdon, discussing storms, criticises the 'monotony of images in literary works' and asserts that 'To characterize the sea in fury, writers use the same expressions'.[192] He recognises, however, the narrative purpose of such set-pieces, noting that 'A storm is a literary device that makes it possible to change the course of events'. Sea voyages are often used as a romance convention by means of which characters are moved around from one adventure to the next. Just as writers can use the sea and storms as literary devices, so too can they be used by characters within the romances themselves to manipulate the truth. *Sir Tristrem's* eponymous hero illustrates this well when, after drifting at sea for more than nine weeks, he realises that he has come to Ireland, a place where he must conceal his true identity (since he was earlier responsible for the death of the queen's

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[191] *Sir Amadace*, ll. 505-16.

[192] Jean Verdon, *Travel in the Middle Ages*, trans. by George Holoch (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), p. 56. On the storm as a rhetorical topos in Middle English alliterative poetry, see Nicolas Jacobs, 'Alliterative Storms: A Topos in Middle English', *Speculum*, 47 (1972), 695-719.

brother, Moraunt). When questioned by the queen, Tristrem makes up a scenario that will explain his arrival in Ireland and also his injuries:

> Marchaund ich have ben ay;
> Mi nam is Tramtris.
> Robbers, for sothe to say,
> Slough mine felawes, ywis,
> In the se.
> Thai raft me fowe and griis
> And thus wounded thai me.[193]

Tristrem's story is entirely plausible and is readily accepted by the queen. Piracy was a very real danger for sea-goers throughout the Middle Ages and Tristrem easily gets round any potential problems with the lack of supporting evidence for his account by explaining that the dead bodies of his companions were lost in the sea and that the thieves took all his merchandise.[194]

Tristrem's fabrication is one necessitated by the circumstances in which he finds himself: he would likely be condemned to death were his real identity to be known. In Chrétien's *Cligés*, meanwhile, a duplicitous messenger seeks personal gain by twisting the facts about his shipwreck. This messenger is part of a group sent by the dying Greek emperor to seek his eldest son and heir, Alexander, and by chance is the only survivor when the search party is hit by a tempest. The man favours Alexander's younger brother and therefore decides to pretend that the shipwreck occurred on the way back from Britain, rather than on the way there, claiming that Alexander was drowned too.[195] *Cligés's* messenger abuses the fact that he is the only witness to what actually happened by inventing his own version of events. Not only the romance authors, but also characters within the romances themselves, can be seen to exploit the rich dramatic potential of the sea, using its scope for disaster and trial to full effect in their stories. The frequency with which storms and shipwrecks are portrayed in

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[193] *Sir Tristrem*, ll. 1215-21. In the corresponding section of the *Tristrams Saga*, Tristram simply changes his name to Tramtris and gives no explanation for his wound (pp. 46-7). The piracy story is unlikely to have been introduced by the Middle English poet, however, since it is also present in Gottfried's version (see pp. 141-2) of the tale and presumably would therefore have also been in Thomas's *Tristran*.

[194] It is surprising to note that although piracy was indeed common in the Middle Ages – for further information, see Kristine T. Utterback, 'Pirates and Pilgrims on the Late-Medieval Journey to Jerusalem', *Medieval Perspectives*, 12 (1997), 123-133 – it is extremely unusual to find it mentioned in romances even when they feature long journeys by sea. *Huon of Burdeux* provides one rare example; see pp. 375-8.

[195] Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligés*, ed. by Stewart Gregory and Claude Luttrell (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993), ll. 2371-400.

romances bears clear testimony to the way in which the perils of sea travel are evidently relished by authors for providing a range of sensational scenarios.

Despite the tendency to interpret sea conditions as a form of divine judgement, people were much more likely to adopt a far less spiritual attitude to matters if their passage was calm or if they were not themselves directly involved in trouble at sea. The resulting ambivalent attitude to the ocean is summed up well by Ribémont who describes a 'mer de dangers, de peur, mer aventureuse, mais aussi mer d'abondance, mer des possibles'.[196] As we saw above in *Sir Amadace*, a shipwreck could bring good fortune to those who found it. If there were no survivors then any goods washed up might swiftly be claimed by the finder, regardless of any laws intended to protect the wreck. Even when a ship was blown off course intact and with its crew unharmed, locals might interpret this as a piece of luck and attempt to plunder the vulnerable vessel. A ship intended for the Sultan suffers this fate in the early fifteenth-century *Sowdone of Babylone*; its master explains:

> A drift of wedire us droffe to Rome,
> The Romaynes robbed us anone;
> Of us thai slowgh ful many one.[197]

The Romans take advantage of the ship being blown off course into their territory by robbing it of £1000 in goods, including furs and spices designed as gifts for the Sultan.

A similar situation arises in *Richard Coer de Lyon*, when the hero's cargo ships are disabled by a fierce, five-day long, tempest,

> And were in poynt to synke adowne
> As they came ayenst the Lymosowne.
> And thre shyppes ryght anone
> All tobrake ayenst the stone;
> All to peces they totare,
> Unnethe the folke saued ware.[198]

Those on board have only a brief respite, however, before the local inhabitants turn on the unfortunate sailors, killing 1600 and imprisoning 500. The local people are

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[196] Bernard Ribémont, 'Physique et fiction: une mythologie "scientifique" de l'eau dans les encyclopédies médiévales', in *L'Eau au Moyen Age: symboles et usages. Actes du colloque Orléans - Mai 1994*, ed. by Bernard Ribémont (Orléans: Paradigme), pp. 95-109 (p. 109).
[197] *The Sowdone of Babylone* in *Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances*, ed. by Alan Lupack (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1990), ll. 76-8.
[198] *Richard*, ll. 2057-62.

extremely happy with what they see as a windfall of treasure upon their shore and are not at all deterred by the fact that they need to murder and imprison in order to secure possession of the ships' freight. The fact that the sea has driven such well-laden ships onto their land confers on them all the right that they need to justify, in their own minds, seizure of the goods. While a storm was a dreadful piece of misfortune for the sailors involved and the merchants whose wares were being carried, from the alternative perspective of the local inhabitants it could be an excellent stroke of luck.[199]

Fantasy and Reality in Sea Travel

Although there are numerous examples of dramatic episodes of storm and shipwreck in romance texts, tempered with this is the more mundane – or sometimes realistic – usage of the sea as a setting. Medieval romance takes a different attitude to sea travel from that of some of its predecessors. In earlier Scandinavian literature, for example, 'the depiction of the ship as a beast traversing a tract of land' is common and reflects a more confrontational way of thinking about the act of crossing the sea.[200] Olsen speculates that the numerous animal images in their writing about sea travel reflects the Vikings' perception of the sea as 'a continuous personal challenge'. She further suggests that

> The sea had to be conquered on every sea-voyage; every successful completion of a journey must have been as satisfactory as a victory against their many enemies.[201]

The attitude evinced in Old French and Middle English romances seems rather different: the sea may well at times become a difficult obstacle, but it is not necessary to fight against it on every voyage. Quite often, journeys over water are completed without incident and are therefore viewed in a more everyday light.

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[199] Such 'luck' can, of course, be engineered and ships deliberately lured onto rocks by wreckers. This scenario is not common in the fiction of the Middle Ages; although Lydgate does describe an instance in his *Troy Book*, the motive is not material gain but revenge. See *Lydgate's Troy Book*, III, Book 5, ll. 929-46.

[200] Ships are likened to animals such as horses, reindeer, harts, beasts of burden, snakes and bears. See Karin Olsen, 'Animated Ships in Old English and Old Norse Poetry', in *Animals and the Symbolic in Mediaeval Art and Literature*, ed. by L.A.J.R. Houwen (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1997), pp. 53-66 (p. 53).

[201] Olsen, 'Animated Ships', p. 66.

Although the ships of medieval romance are rarely explicitly compared with horses as in earlier literature, their function is nonetheless often strikingly similar to that of the knight-hero's horse.[202] By an interesting lexical coincidence, which serves to emphasise the comparison further, the Middle English verb *riden* can be used in relation to both horses and ships.[203] Even today we still have the expression 'to ride out a storm' which evidently refers to doing so in a boat.[204] As a means of transport the ship is more difficult to control and direct than the horse, but permits the knight to continue his progress across stretches of water. The voyage itself may be of little significance and the direction a ship takes immaterial. As David Quint asserts,

> ... the boat of romance, in its purest form, has no other destination than the adventure at hand. It cannot be said to be off course. New adventures crop up all the time, and the boat's travels describe a romance narrative that is open-ended and potentially endless.[205]

Quint's comments, though, are most applicable to the rudderless and enchanted boats of romance and overlook the other range of scenarios in which ships appear in the corpus.

Large fleets of ships also feature quite frequently in romance, moving in a purposeful way, although in such instances the sea is usually depicted solely as a transport route for armies on the move and rarely provides the setting for any significant action or a backdrop for the battle itself. Lengthy and detailed descriptions of armies or individuals setting sail, such as the famous passage in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, when Arthur and his army embark on a voyage across the Channel, are quite rare.[206] Equally, few naval battles of the Middle Ages are well-known and this absence is reflected in romances, which rarely depict battles out at sea.[207] The *Alliterative Morte*

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[202] The image of the ship as a horse can, incidentally, still be found quite commonly in Anglo-Saxon poetry, although the other beast imagery cannot.

[203] The *MED* defines 'riden on (bi, at, an) anker' as 'to be aboard a ship at anchor', or the verb can be used of the ship itself.

[204] The *OED* notes the first recorded use of this expression in the sixteenth century.

[205] David Quint, 'The Boat of Romance and Renaissance Epic', in *Romance: Generic Transformation from Chrétien de Troyes to Cervantes*, ed. by Kevin Brownlee and Marina Scordilis Brownlee (London: University Press of New England, 1985), pp. 178-202 (p. 179).

[206] *King Arthur's Death: The Middle English 'Stanzaic Morte Arthur' and 'Alliterative Morte Arthure'*, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1986; repr. 1995), ll. 729-59.

[207] Speaking of the *Gesta Henrici Quinti* account of the battle of Harfleur in 1500, Friel comments: 'The account is fairly typical of medieval descriptions of sea battles: little detail and much blood.' Ian Friel, *The Good Ship: Ships, Shipbuilding and Technology in England 1200-1520* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), p. 151.

again proves to be an exception to the general rule, devoting around one hundred lines to a description of a sea battle near Southampton.[208] Mary Hamel argues convincingly that this section of the *Alliterative Morte* is an example of a stylised literary topos that was used not only in poetic fiction but also in prose chronicle. She concludes, nevertheless, that for all its formulaic nature,

> the topos is indeed based on actual practice – weaponry, tactics, signals, outcomes; thus while the topos in Middle English narrative poetry – fiction – offers scenes of lively activity grounded on concrete historical detail, it also offers the modern reader a real window on medieval naval history... .[209]

Hamel, however, offers no further examples of the topos being used in other romances, and it appears that the author of the *Alliterative Morte* had an unusual interest in expanding the nautical elements of his source material.

For the most part, when fleets are mentioned in lines consisting of anything more than a swift passing reference, it is because the authors wish to develop them as a spectacle and are relatively unconcerned with real-life nautical detail and practicalities. Ships present the writer with an opportunity to launch into the kind of exaggerated descriptive praise that is so characteristic of romance, the sort that can also be found applied to many other romance objects or people, such as the knight-hero, the heroine, castles, horses, tents, arms and clothing.

One extravagant example is to be found in *Richard Coer de Lyon*, in the depiction of the ship of Cassodorien, daughter of the king of Antioch, future wife of King Henry and mother of Richard. Her marvellous craft is pictured in the following terms:

> Swylk on ne seyȝ þey neuere non.
> Al it was whyt off ruel-bon,
> And euery nayl wiþ gold begraue;
> Off pure gold was þe staue,
> Here mast was of yuory,
> Off samyte þe sayl wytterly,
> Here ropes were off tuely sylk,
> Also whyte as ony mylk.
> Þat noble schyp was al wiþoute

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[208] See ll. 3612-3711 in the *Alliterative Morte*.

[209] Mary Hamel, 'The *Descriptio Navalis Pugnae* in Middle English Literature', in *Art and Context in Late Medieval English Narrative. Essays in Honor of Robert Worth Frank, Jr*, ed. by Robert R. Edwards (Cambridge: Brewer, 1994), pp. 149-62 (p. 162).

Wiþ cloþis off gold spred aboute;
And here looff and here wyndas
Off asure forsoþe it was.[210]

The majesty of this ship is in proportion to the beauty of the lady it transports. Just as expensive clothing, made from exotic materials, is often described when a lady is introduced into a romance to indicate her nobility and loveliness so the ship functions in this text to indicate the status of Cassodorien.

Grandiose fleets of ships also sometimes appear in romances as a symbol of the perceived alterity and outlandish abundance that was believed in the medieval West to be characteristic of Islamic or Eastern peoples. Excessively decorative warships are a source of wonder but at the same time may also reflect the misplaced pride of their heathen owners who will ultimately suffer a fall, in the form of defeat at the hand of their Christian enemies. This last possibility certainly appears applicable to *The Sowdone of Babylone*. The text contains a typically impressive example of a fine non-Christian vessel, the Sultan's dromond (warship):

Two maistres were in the dromounde,
Two goddes on hye seten thore
In the maister toppe, withe macis rounde,
To manace with the Cristen lore.
The sailes were of rede sendelle,
Embrowdred with riche arraye,
With beestes and breddes every dele,
That was right curious and gaye;
The armes displaied of Laban
Of asure and foure lions of goolde.[211]

Interestingly, later in this romance, the Christian heroes Guy and Charlemagne must pursue the Sultan over the seas to exact revenge. On this occasion the narrator, by contrast, merely tells us:

Anoon to shippe every man
With vitaile and with store,
Euen towarde the proud Sawdan
Withouten any more.[212]

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[210] *Richard*, ll. 61-72. The *MED* glosses *lof* (of which *looff* is a variant) as 'a spar holding out and down the windward tack of a square sail while going into the wind', while a *wyndas* (windlass in modern English) is an apparatus for hoisting or hauling. For further information on medieval maritime terminology, see Bertil Sandahl, *Middle English Sea Terms*, 3 vols (Uppsala: University of Uppsala, 1951-82).

[211] *The Sowdone of Babylone*, ll. 125-34. The word *dromound* is of Greek origin, and is first recorded in 1191 according to the *MED*. There are a number of examples of its usage in the fourteenth century, after which it becomes far more common in the fifteenth century when the *Sowdone* was written.

There is essentially no description whatsoever of the Christian fleet; theirs is a dynamic pursuit, with only a few practicalities (such as the loading of food supplies) mentioned. The Christian ships are simply a means to an end, rather than a spectacle in their own right. As the lines above note, one of the vices of the Sultan is his pride, which is clearly suggested by his excessively beautiful fleet.[213] The Sultan's own warship has been designed more for purposes of display than with a practical view of how it might be most effective in battle. He has furthermore installed the images of two pagan gods in a prominent position to 'manace' his Christian opponents, a detail that for a Christian audience might call to mind the futility of trusting in false idols.

In its flamboyantly exaggerated nature, this ship resembles the elaborate tents and pavilions that will be discussed in the following chapter. Tents do not receive the same amount of attention as ships in *The Sowdone of Babylone* and it is possible to interpret the Sultan's ship as a symbol of his power and status, working in much the same way as – or even as a substitute for – a magnificent pavilion.[214] Both ship and pavilion have an obvious practical side, as forms of transport and accommodation, but their practical side is far less important than the spectacle that is created to bolster the image of a commanding and impressive leader on the move.

These kinds of fabulous romance vessels are evidently fictitious: visually impressive and endowed with pleasant on-board accommodation for their illustrious passengers. Yet, are there any grains of truth in such sumptuous ships?

Just as there were some magnificent pavilions created by actual rulers – often in imitation of those imagined in romance – a number of prestigious royal warships were constructed.[215] Friel cites some examples, including the Newcastle galley[216] of 1295,

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[212] *The Sowdone of Babylone*, ll. 767-70.

[213] For another example of the association of richness with pride in the description of a heathen fleet, see *Sir Isumbras* in *Six Middle English Romances*, ed. by Mills, ll. 199-240.

[214] For example, when the Sultan arrives before Rome, his pavilion is mentioned (at l. 203) but not described at all.

[215] Friel comments that although a few English kings (particularly John, Edward III and Henry V) did build up royal war fleets these fleets seldom lasted long and 'There was no English equivalent of the great French galley-base at Rouen, the Clos des Galées, which existed from 1294 to 1418'; *The Good Ship*, p. 15.

[216] Medieval maritime terminology can be confusing as meanings shifted. Friel notes that 'The term "galley" in thirteenth-century England denoted a clinker-built, north European oared ship, but by the fifteenth century it tended to be applied only to vessels of Mediterranean origin'; *The Good Ship*, p. 38.

Henry V's *Trinity Royal* of 1415, and the *Katerine Pleasaunce* made for Henry VIII a century later, which must all have been remarkable sights.[217] He comments too that, although highly decorated ships appear quite regularly in paintings and manuscript illuminations, the documentary evidence is scarce and survives mostly only for the exceptional large royal warships. In his opinion, 'most vessels probably had a nondescript appearance, sometimes enlivened by flags or painted wooden pavises (shields hung along the side)'.[218] Anderson and Anderson further add that decoration of ships perhaps increased during the reign of Elizabeth I, when vessels

> ... had all their upper works painted in bright colours and striking patterns, but it had by no means reached its height. That came in the next century, when the art of the woodcarver was employed to such an extent that ships became more beautiful than at any time before or since.[219]

There was therefore a limited degree of external decoration on certain prestigious medieval ships. The literary examples above are all exaggerated, constructed as they are from materials of the highest quality and value and by the best craftsmen, all of which is unsurprising given the medieval writer's penchant for superlatives. A certain level of ornamentation, however, could have been found in the actual ships of the time although it will clearly always be difficult to determine the extent to which historical vessels were embellished because of the problems of survival with wooden artefacts.

A limited number of other sources do survive, however, that suggest that, even though the kind of grandeur of the ships in texts such as *The Sowdone of Babylone* was deliberately overstated, some level of comfort was actually achieved in medieval marine transport. A letter from the fifth century, written by Sidonius Apollinaris to his friend Trygetius, suggests that even at this very early period, some luxury had already been made a reality. Sidonius writes in an attempt to persuade his friend to undertake a journey by boat and conjures an enticing image:

> There awaits you a bed made of cushions, a chess board with pawns of two colors, many dice eager to bounce on the ivory sides of their cups; to keep your dangling feet from being soaked by the sloshing of the dirty water of the hold, the curved sides of the ship will be topped by a bridge

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[217] Friel, *The Good Ship*, p. 76.
[218] Friel, *The Good Ship*, p. 76.
[219] *The Sailing Ship. Six Thousand Years of History*, ed. by Romola and R.C. Anderson (London: Harrap, 1926; reissued 1980), p. 139.

> of pine planks; there you will be protected from the perfidies of the winter damp by the screen of a tent cloth sloping over your head. What more could be done for your refined leisure than to surprise you by arriving when you have barely noticed your journey.[220]

Sidonius is clearly trying to win over his friend and may indeed be using poetic licence, but his description seems unlikely to have been embroidered so much as to have been unbelievable. For those who could afford a little luxury while travelling, it appears to have been available even in the fifth century.

It is difficult to trace out the development of refinements made for passengers in precise stages but, as Ohler claims,

> ... until comparatively recent times it was possible to travel faster, and more comfortably, by sea than on land; the position did not radically alter until the coming of the railways... in the last hundred and fifty years.[221]

The construction of vessels with more than one deck meant that there was more shelter available and thereby increased the potential for comfort.[222] By the twelfth century, Chrétien de Troyes is using a simile in *Erec et Enide* which also implies that boats were a comfortable method of transportation. When Enide's cousin offers her a palfrey as a gift, she proudly claims that

> qui le chevalche ne s'an dialt,
> einz va plus aeise et söef
> que s'il estoit an une nef.[223]
>
> [nobody who rides it is uncomfortable, but goes more easily and gently than if he were in a boat.]

Enide's cousin clearly overlooks the possibility of stormy sea conditions, which would have made even the finest ship a rather uncomfortable place to be. There is certainly evidence though that the highest-ranking passengers were relatively well-housed on board, even if they could not be protected from the natural unpredictability of the sea.

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[220] Quoted in Verdon, *Travel in the Middle Ages*, pp. 35-6.

[221] Norbert Ohler, *The Medieval Traveller*, trans. by Caroline Hillier (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1989), p. 1. For other accounts of travelling conditions on board medieval ships, see Verdon, *Travel in the Middle Ages*, pp. 1-108; and J.J. Jusserand, *English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Lucy Toulmin Smith (London: University Paperbacks, 1961), pp. 214-17.

[222] Friel observes, however, that written information on the internal features of medieval ships is sketchy. 'In the Mediterranean, large sailing ships with two or even three decks were being built as early as the thirteenth century, but it is not known for certain if northern European ships of any size had more than one deck before the fifteenth century'; *The Good Ship*, pp. 76-7.

[223] Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec and Enide*, ed. by Carleton W. Carroll with an introduction by William W. Kibler (New York: Garland, 1987), ll. 1388-90.

Provision of cabins is recorded as early as 1228, 'when a ship sent to Gascony was fitted with a chamber for the king's "things"...'.[224] Writing of the voyage back to France after the Seventh Crusade in 1254, Joinville also mentions the fact that the walls of the king's room had to be knocked down in order to stop the ship being blown along out of control.[225] Cabins were evidently an extravagance that could sometimes be impractical to the extent of putting the ship at risk. It is unsurprising, therefore, that 'Cabins aboard medieval ships were generally for the use of the rich and powerful and their entourages, and they must have been very restricted in number'.[226]

For those of lower status, castle structures on deck – which became increasingly common during the thirteenth century – could provide additional accommodation and cover, although their primary use was as a defensive superstructure. Alternatively, more temporary shelter could be fashioned and, as Campbell asserts, 'Il était possible d'obtenir un espace privé à l'aide de rideaux ou de tentes'.[227] The crew, meanwhile, had to suffer even more basic living conditions. McGrail states that 'Entries in late thirteenth-century financial accounts concerning the building of galleys for the English king ... suggest that a canvas awning spread above the deck was all the protection the crew had'. He adds, however, that illustrations on thirteenth-century seals indicate 'that the bigger ships may by then have had a deck under which the crew could have slept and ate'.[228]

A poem known as *The Pilgrims* [*sic*] *Sea-Voyage and Sea-Sickness*, probably composed in the fourteenth century, bears witness to the disagreeable conditions that the average pilgrim traveller might have faced on his sea journey. It, too, does mention the building of small cabins, but these would have been only for a very limited number of the richest passengers. Many are condemned to sleep in a much less salubrious setting:

> A sak of strawe were there ryght good,
> Ffor som must lyg theym in theyr hood;
> I had as lefe be in the wood,

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[224] Hutchinson, *Medieval Ships and Shipping*, p. 47.
[225] Quoted by Verdon, *Travel in the Middle Ages*, p. 59.
[226] Friel, *The Good Ship*, p. 77.
[227] Campbell, 'En haute mer', pp. 39-40. For an illustration of a boat with curtains around it, forming a pavilion, see Virginie Greene, 'The Bed and the Boat: Illustrations of the Demoiselle d'Escalot's Story in Illuminated Manuscripts of *La Mort Artu*', *Arthuriana*, 12: 4 (2002), 50-73 (p. 59 and fig. 11).
[228] McGrail, *Boats of the World*, p. 230.

Without mete or drynk;
For when that we shall go to bedde,
The pumpe was nygh oure beddes hede,
A man were as good to be dede
As smell therof the stynk![229]

This is by no means an exceptional account of the dismal conditions at sea; Utterback notes from her study of writings about medieval voyages that 'virtually every account mentions the stench on board, bad water, lack of fresh food and seasickness'.[230] The poet appears to speak from bitter experience and leaves the reader in no doubt that the long voyage to reach the pilgrimage site at Compostela is an arduous and unpleasant one.[231] He also refers to the seasickness, which must have been very common amongst passengers unused to sailing:

For som ar lyke to cowgh and grone
Or hit be ful mydnyght.[232]

Seasickness was so widespread amongst travellers that specific legislation was even introduced, ruling that agreements made on the open sea should not be valid because 'at times men whom the sea makes sick go on board of ships, and if they had a thousand marks of silver they would promise it to anyone who would put them ashore'.[233]

Despite the reality, seasickness is relatively rarely mentioned in romances. Chrétien de Troyes does, however, allude to it twice in *Cligés*, the romance in which he most prominently includes several journeys over the sea. When Alexander first sets out from Greece to serve Arthur in Britain, he sails with a large company of men for the whole of April and part of May. They land at Southampton without problems, except for the fact that even the strongest of the young men is in poor health after the long voyage:

Li vaslet, qui n'orent apris
A sofrir meseise ne painne,

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[229] The poem comes from a fifteenth-century MS at Trinity College, Cambridge, and is published in *The Stacions of Rome, the Pilgrims Sea-Voyage and Clene Maydenhood*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS 25 (London: Trübner, 1867), ll. 65-72.
[230] Utterback, 'Pirates and Pilgrims', p. 123.
[231] Utterback points out, however, that 'part of the merit in visiting the Holy Land in the first place was the chance to suffer for Christ's sake'; 'Pirates and Pilgrims', p. 123.
[232] *Pilgrims Sea-Voyage*, ll. 23-4.
[233] Quoted by Hutchinson in *Medieval Ships and Shipping*, p. 3, and originally from the *Customs of the Sea*, published in the *Black Book of the Admiralty Vol 3*, ed. by Travers Twiss (London: Longman, 1874), pp. 445-7.

En mer qui ne lor fu pas sainne
Orent longuemant demoré
Tant que trestuit descoloré
Et afebli furent et vain
Tuit li plus fort et li plus sain.[234]

[The young men, unused to suffering discomfort and hardship, had been so long on the uncongenial sea that the strongest and healthiest of them had quite lost their colour and grown weak and feeble.]

Whether this is to be attributed to scurvy or seasickness we are not told, but it is a surprisingly realistic detail for a romance writer to bring in. Later, too, Chrétien refers to the fact that seasickness is a familiar affliction for travellers when he tells us that Guinevere fails to notice that Soredamors and Alexander are lovesick for each other only because she believes that their suffering is due to seasickness:

Espoir bien s'an aparceüst
Se la mers ne la deceüst.
Mes la mers l'angingne et deçoit
Si qu'an la mer l'amor ne voit.[235]

[She might perhaps have realised it, had not the sea deceived her; but she is duped and tricked by the sea, so that on it she is blinded to the love.]

The two lovers encourage her in this false belief, wishing to keep their love secret for fear of rejection. The underlying pun was probably inspired by Thomas's *Tristran*, in which there is a great deal of similar play on words for love, the sea and bitterness.[236] Scheidegger remarks that the sea is responsible for both the good and evil in Tristran and Yseut's lives:

> Cette ambivalence se tisse dans le texte au rythme des fluctuations du signifiant: entre *la mer*, *l'amer* (l'aimer) et l'*amer* (l'amertume), entre *l'amur* et *la mort*, le signifiant semble aussi fluctuant que l'eau. La mer est complice et opposante tout à la fois... .[237]

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[234] *Cligés*, ll. 276-82.
[235] *Cligés*, ll. 547-50.
[236] See, for example, *Tristran*, ll. 2478ff. There is some debate over the relative dating of *Tristran* and *Cligés*, but in his edition of *Tristran*, Gregory suggest dates of around 1170 for *Tristran* and 1176 for *Cligés*. Freeman asserts, though, that *Cligés* 'comments on the *Tristan* (especially on the legend identified as the *version commune* and represented by Béroul)' rather than the *version courtoise*, represented by Thomas's *Tristran*; Michelle A. Freeman, *The Poetics of 'Translatio Studii' and 'Conjointure'. Chrétien de Troyes's 'Cligés'* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1979), p. 15.
[237] Jean R. Scheidegger, 'Flux et reflux de la marée et du désir dans *Tristan et Iseut*', in *L'Eau au Moyen Age*, ed. by Ribémont, pp. 111-31 (p. 125).

Tristran and Yseut are rare exceptions in feeling reluctance rather than relief at safely reaching their destination. For the lovers, the discomforts of sailing, such as seasickness, are far outweighed by the freedom they have on board.

Tristran and Yseut's passionate love affair begins at sea, during the voyage that is taking Yseut to marry King Mark in Cornwall, when they accidentally drink the love potion intended for Mark and Yseut. The Middle English version of the tale even grants the wind and weather conditions some collusion in this forbidden love by describing a lengthy delay in the journey:

> A wind again hem blewe
> That sail no might ther be.
> So rewe the knightes trew,
> Tristrem, so rewe he.[238]

It is just after these lines that the lovers drink the potion, and a link does seem to be implied. If the voyage had gone smoothly and swiftly in the first place, without the delaying winds, then perhaps Tristrem and Ysonde would never have stumbled across, and consumed, the love potion. Once in love, Tristrem and Ysonde sleep together each night, making the most of the ship's isolation at sea which allows them to inhabit a space exempt from the normal rules of their society.

The Symbolism of the Sea

As well as the sort of play on words found in Thomas's *Tristran* and Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligés*, literary depictions of sea travel frequently exploit the wide range of figurative meanings and associations connected with words such as ship, anchor, storm and the sea itself.[239] While many of these individual words are semantically charged, there are also larger political and religious connotations attached to ideas of sailing and ships. These notions have a timeless symbolic quality that has been exploited by writers

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[238] *Sir Tristrem*, ll. 1653-6. The episode is presented differently in other versions of the story: in the *Tristrams Saga* the hero accidentally drinks the potion after becoming thirsty on a particularly hot day (pp. 71-2); in Gottfried's *Tristan* it is drunk while the ship is at anchor for a time in order to give Isolde and her companions a chance to recover from their sea-sickness (pp. 194-204).

[239] In his study of Middle English proverbs, Whiting cites examples of expressions containing the words port, ship, boat, anchor, waves and sail; Bartlett Jere Whiting, *Proverbs, Sentences and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly Before 1500* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 9, 51-2, 466, 500, 515-16, 630.

of all periods. Most common in the medieval age are the concepts of the ship of state and the Church as a ship. Elizabeth Fowler explains:

> The Latin verb for steering a ship (*gubernare)* also designates political governance, and so, perhaps by paronomasia, the image became a useful memorial location for propositions about statecraft. Engravings of ships are familiar political symbols on coins in many cultures, and medieval English towns often chose ships to represent them when they inaugurated their town seals.[240]

It is interesting that the ship developed such a divergent range of symbolic associations. In addition to the connection with government, Richard Unger observes that 'ships were a common motif for popular devotion. The ark or the ship was often shown as the Church trying to avoid danger'.[241] Indeed, as Kolve points out in his famous chapter on *The Man of Law's Tale*,

> the very word "nave", used to identify the largest space in the cathedral, the space where the laity hears mass, comes from the Latin *navis*, meaning "ship", and the "ship's keel" roof that characterizes certain church naves – a roof that looks like the inside of an upturned boat, and depends upon construction techniques related to boat building – may represent a translation of that symbolism into architectural fact.[242]

Particularly from the fifteenth century onwards, the image of a ship containing a church became popular and Noah's ark was interpreted as prefiguring a vessel that would rescue mankind from damnation.[243] Evidently linked to this notion is the idea of 'life as a voyage and man as a pilgrim stranger in a foreign land, seeking to return home.'[244] Marchand comments that such allegories can be found very strikingly in the Old English poems *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*, and throughout medieval sermon literature.

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[240] Elizabeth Fowler, 'The Ship Adrift', in *'The Tempest' and its Travels*, ed. by Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman (London: Reaktion, 2000), pp. 37-40 (p. 38).
[241] Richard W. Unger, *The Art of Medieval Technology. Images of Noah the Shipbuilder* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), p. 126.
[242] Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*, pp. 315-16.
[243] See D'A.J.D. Boulton, 'The Middle French Statutes of the Monarchical Order of the Ship (Naples, 1381): A Critical Edition, with Introduction and Notes', *Mediaeval Studies*, 47 (1985), 168-271 (p. 212).
[244] James W. Marchand, 'The Ship Allegory in the *Ezzolied* and in Old Icelandic', *Neophilologus*, 60 (1976), 238-50 (p. 239). On this subject, see also Dee Dyas, *Pilgrimage in Medieval English Literature 700-1500* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2001), pp. 67-124. Dyas adds: 'The concept of pilgrimage as mankind's journey through life to the heavenly home was in fact so deeply embedded in the minds and imaginations of those who produced Old English poetry and prose that it was possible for it to be widely used without explanation or amplification.' (p. 68)

Fascinatingly, a copy of the statutes survives for a company founded in 1381 by King Carlo III 'di Durazzo' (of Jerusalem and mainland Sicily), called the Order of the Ship. Its prologue refers to the multiple symbolic meanings of the ship, justifying the choice of emblem for the order by declaring that '... the device represents simultaneously the Ark of Noah, the ships of the Greek and Roman heroes..., the Blessed Virgin Mary..., and finally the Catholic Faith itself'.[245] Members of the order were permitted to wear a very basic ship-badge, which effectively depicted a 'rudderless ship'. The statutes contain no less than thirty-three ordinances that describe the various feats of arms that the companions must perform, mostly against Saracens, in order to earn the right to add details to their basic ship-template.[246] The additions that can be earned include oars, a rudder, anchors, sails and banners (in various specified colours and positions). A member of the order would have ended up with all the pieces of the ship only if he had completed a series of testing exploits. There seems a clear implication here that only then would he be deserving of the responsibility of the figurative position of master of a fully-appointed, rather than an unsteerable, ship. Governance of a ship then, even one that is simply an image as in this case, is synonymous with social achievement and perhaps links back therefore to the idea of the ship of state. If the ship equates to the state, when members of the Order are raised to the status of 'owners' or 'masters' of the figurative ship, they have thereby earned the right to be marked out as some of the most high ranking and elite individuals in their community.

Apart from the Grail ships, however, which evidently are of great spiritual significance, the majority of ships in medieval romance are not primarily symbolic but functional.[247] The associations, though, are deeply embedded in the culture of the day and so it is impossible to detach the romance ships entirely from a political or spiritual context. They may not primarily be allegories of ships of state or the Church but, as we shall see, there are certainly a multitude of references and associations that romance authors could play on, and that their audiences would have easily interpreted.

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[245] Boulton, 'Statutes of the Monarchical Order of the Ship', pp. 211-12.
[246] Boulton, 'Statutes of the Monarchical Order of the Ship', pp. 265-9.
[247] For further discussion of Grail ships see below, pp. 114-15.

The Rudderless Boat

Probably the most popular sea-related topos of medieval fiction was that of the innocent woman and/or child put to sea in a rudderless boat. The literary theme derives from a historically real punishment that was generally used if the evidence of the accused's guilt was inconclusive or if the judge wished to temper justice with mercy.[248] In literature, being set adrift developed into the spiritual journey par excellence since the person on board such a boat usually has no means of steering or propulsion and is therefore entirely in the hands of God. It clearly relates to ideas such as that of the voyage as pilgrimage and the religious allegory of the Church as a ship, while still retaining all the characteristics of entertaining drama.

The motif of being cast adrift in a boat has a long history of at least two thousand years.[249] Those who suffer such treatment consist of many different types:

> great saints and great sinners; infant heroes, and children whose birth is deeply tainted; politically dangerous men and falsely accused women; both women and men with powers beyond the ordinary... .[250]

Most familiar to romances are the categories of infant heroes and falsely accused women (often possessed of great virtue or saintliness). Chaucer uses the latter type in his *Man of Law's Tale*. His version of the story of Custance begins with a very different kind of sea voyage from those that dominate the rest of the narrative. Custance, the daughter of the Roman emperor, is sent over the water to Syria to marry its Sultan on the understanding that he and all his subjects will convert to Christianity. She is suitably accompanied on this journey by 'bisshopes' along with 'Lordes, ladies, knyghtes of renuon, / And oother folk ynowe... .'[251] As Kolve points out, this first voyage is splendid and

> we are surely meant to associate it with the ship of the Church, as that image was known and understood throughout the Middle Ages. The literal boat is subsumed within a larger icon, for its freight is not simply an emperor's daughter and her entourage, but the Christian faith itself

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[248] See Reinhard, 'Setting Adrift', p. 47.

[249] For more detail on the earliest surviving examples, see Donald B. Redford, 'The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child,' *Numen*, 14 (1967), 209-28; and also Cooper, *The English Romance*, pp. 106-36, who describes romance as a 'comparative latecomer in adopting the motif' (p. 106).

[250] Cooper, *The English Romance*, p. 113.

[251] *The Man of Law's Tale* from *The Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), ll. 253-4.

> going out across the waters; it is at once their protection, their treasure, and their charge.[252]

Custance's two later voyages are a very different matter; in these she is cast adrift each time 'in a ship al steerelees' by an evil mother-figure (l. 439). The passenger of a rudderless boat is cut off from the usual protection s/he could seek in the form of the ship of the Church; s/he is alone and the journey is a much more personal one of individual faith and, sometimes, penance.

As Cooper has noted, rudderless boats have something in common with Jonah's whale and this analogy is drawn in many medieval texts.[253] Throughout such texts there is the idea that God will protect the innocent in these circumstances, a notion that acts as a corollary to the belief that the sea will not tolerate a sinner. Sea conditions can be interpreted as a reflection of God's approbation or displeasure.

In literature, the punishment of setting adrift is usually carried out unfairly, and such is the situation in the mid-fourteenth-century *Sir Eglamour*, when the unmarried Cristabel gives birth to a son. Her fate is harsh since she would have married Eglamour, the father of her child, but for her own father's delaying tactics which have sent the hero away to perform three difficult tasks in order to win her hand. Cristabel's father ignores this fact, however, and vents his anger upon mother and child:

> Dowȝtyr, into þe see schalt thowe
> In a schyp alone;
> And þat bastard þat ys þe dere
> Cristundam schall non haue here![254]

Cristabel has neither a mast nor a rudder and, unlike many of those who are put to sea in this way, is also without food. After six days of drifting, she fortuitously arrives in Egypt where her uncle is king. Not wishing him to know the truth, however, she adapts her story and claims that she was sailing for pleasure when her squire fell asleep and the boat got into trouble.

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[252] Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*, p. 308.

[253] Cooper, *The English Romance*, p. 119. Chaucer himself makes the comparison in *The Man of Law's Tale* when his narrator asks, 'Who kepte hire [Custance] fro the drenchyng in the see? / Who kepte Jonas in the fisshes mawe / Til he was spouted up at Nynyvee?' (ll. 485-7).

[254] *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, ed. by Frances E. Richardson, EETS 256 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), Cotton MS, ll. 806-9.

Eglamour, meanwhile, upon his return to Artois learns of his lover's fate and assumes she is dead. He adopts an image of woman and child on board a ship as his arms although, curiously, the image appears to portray a fully steerable ship with mast and ropes.[255] The image is clearly inaccurate but, unconsciously, indicates the truth that Cristabel has indeed survived since God saw fit to compensate for her lack of a mast and rudder by guiding the ship to safety Himself. Ultimately, the state of the ship is of less importance than the standing with God of the individuals on board. As the final sea journey of *Sir Eglamour* passes without incident, the narrator observes

> A comly wynd þam draue.
> Thorow þe myght of God þis fayre naue
> Alle in lykynge passed the see:
> In Artasse vp þay raffe.[256]

The trouble-free journey is a clear sign that the characters are in God's grace.

The same conclusion can be drawn from tales in which infants are carried safely across the sea in an unseaworthy vessel. As Cooper notes, the mere fact of the child's survival marks him out as special and favoured by the gods/God.[257] *King Horn* (c. 1225) uses this motif when its young hero and his twelve companions, all children, are put to sea by the pagan invaders who have murdered Horn's father. The pagan admiral evidently assumes the group will perish at sea:

> þaruore þu most to stere,
> þu and þine ifere,
> To schupe schulle 3e funde
> And sinke to þe grunde,
> þe se [schal 3ou] adrenche,
> Ne schal hit us no3t ofþ[e]nche.[258]

The invaders seek Horn's death out of fear that otherwise he will exact revenge upon them when he is older, but opt for a method that will not leave the blood of the young children literally on their hands. It appears to be a failsafe way of killing the young boys, except of course that the would-be murderers have not allowed for the literary tradition of divine intervention to save the innocent from the sea. Horn naturally

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[255] See *Sir Eglamour*, Cotton MS, ll. 1201-9.
[256] *Sir Eglamour*, Lincoln MS, ll. 1335-8.
[257] Cooper, *The English Romance*, p. 110.
[258] *King Horn. An Edition Based on Cambridge University Library MS Gg. 4.27(2)*, ed. by Rosamund Allen (London: Garland, 1984), ll. 103-8.

survives and eventually returns to reclaim his rightful inheritance and punish those who killed his father.

The theme upon which *King Horn* is modelled – exile and return of the hero – is particularly popular in insular romance of the twelfth century. Such returns are always over water, but as Field points out, this is 'so obvious that we tend not to notice it'. The return by water is 'an unavoidable concomitant of the island setting and one that becomes a defining feature of a truly insular tale type'.[259] Field furthermore speculates that the loss of the White Ship in 1120, and with it the death of Henry I's only legitimate son, 'may have given rise to the compensatory fantasy that the heir might return from the sea and save the land from misrule'.[260] Once again, the sea is imagined as a place of limitless potential, with supernatural overtones.

At first glance, Arthur is cast in a similar role to the evil pagans of *King Horn* in the 'slaying of the innocents' episode of the *Suite du Merlin*, part of the thirteenth-century French Post-Vulgate cycle. In the *Suite*, Arthur decides to round up and kill all the new-born children in his land, in response to Merlin's prophecy that one of them will kill him and destroy the kingdom. This event occurs after Arthur has committed incest with his sister, resulting in the birth of Mordred, to whom the prediction evidently refers.[261] Arthur is, however, severely admonished by a heavenly figure who comes to him in a dream. He is advised instead to put all the children in a ship and launch it into the sea without any crew. If they can escape from such danger, Jesus will have clearly demonstrated that He loves them and does not wish their destruction. Arthur at first responds by calling this a 'marvellous vengeance', but the heavenly messenger corrects him, saying,

> Che n'est pas venjance que tu feras, car il ne mesfirent onques riens ne a toi ne a autrui(i), mais chou est pour ta volonté acomplir, et pour chou que tu cuides par ceste chose destorner la destruction del roiame de Logres; mais non feras, car elle averra tout ensi comme li fieus a l'anemi t'a devisé.

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[259] Rosalind Field, 'The King over the Water: Exile-and-Return Revisited', in *Cultural Encounters in the Romance of Medieval England*, ed. by Corinne Saunders (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), pp. 41-53 (p. 43).
[260] Field, 'The King over the Water', p. 50.
[261] Mordred, though, avoids falling into Arthur's hands when he is shipwrecked en route to the court and subsequently is brought up safely in another country.

> [It is not vengeance that you will do, for they have done no wrong to you or to anyone else, but this is to fulfil your wish and because you think that by this act you can turn destruction from the kingdom of Logres; but you will not do it, for it will happen just as the devil's son told you.][262]

Although Arthur initially sought to murder the young children in order to prevent his own downfall, when he commits them to the sea it is not to escape from his fate but, as instructed, to place the children in the hands of God. Arthur's actions therefore are entirely different from those of the invaders in *King Horn*, despite the apparent resemblance. Arthur is required to submit to God's power and trust in his mercy. Such trust is always justified in medieval romances, and the children in the *Suite* come safely to harbour with no loss of life.

It should be remembered, however, that Arthur's actions are set against a backdrop of incest and Malory adapts his source so that Arthur is portrayed less favourably. In the *Morte Darthur*, there is no heavenly messenger and no specific motivation is ascribed to Arthur, be it murderous bloodlust or the desire to place the children's fate in God's hands. Mordred, in this version, does not escape being set adrift with all the others:

> And all were putte in a shyppe to the se; and som were four wekis olde and som lesse. And so by fortune the shyppe drove unto a castelle, and was all to-ryven and destroyed the moste party, save that Mordred was cast up.[263]

Malory does not even specify whether or not the ship was manned by sailors or considered unseaworthy, but he does choose to alter his source so that the children perish. His overriding point, however, seems to be that this bleak outcome was dictated 'by fortune'. Arthur cannot absolve himself so easily from the weighty sin of incest, and equally cannot escape his own destiny.

While most of the examples found in romance involve women or children being set adrift, there is a notable exception to be found in the Tristan legend in which the

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[262] *Merlin: roman en prose du XIIIe siècle*, ed. by Gaston Paris and Jacob Ulrich, 2 vols (Paris: Didot, 1886), I, 208. The translation is by Martha Asher in *Lancelot-Grail. The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy, 5 vols (London: Garland, 1995), IV, 184.
[263] *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory* (hereafter, *Malory*), ed. by Eugène Vinaver, 3rd edn, rev. by P.J.C. Field, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), I, 55.

hero entrusts himself to God and puts to sea in a rudderless boat. It is highly unusual to see an adult male deliberately place himself in such a powerless position and the extremity of the hero's plight is emphasised in the Middle English *Sir Tristrem*. In this version, Tristrem has been tormented for three years by a poisoned wound, suffered when he overcame Moraunt in single combat, without finding a doctor who can cure him. At last therefore he requests a boat from his uncle:

> 'Em,' he seyd, 'Y spille.
> Of lond kepe Y namare.
> A schip thou bring me tille,
> Mine harp to play me thare,
> Stouer ynough to wille
> To kepe me, son you yare.'[264]

Desperate needs call for desperate measures and Tristrem sets out with just Governal for company. They are at sea for more than nine weeks, going wherever the wind drives them.

The only other male figures in medieval literature who voluntarily subject themselves to such a journey without means of steering or propulsion are monks such as the celebrated St Brendan.[265] Brendan's voyage is supposed to have taken place from 565 to 573. The Latin version of his experiences was extremely popular and led to prose and verse translations in English, French, Saxon, Flemish, Welsh, Breton, Irish and Scottish Gaelic. Brendan's journey does involve him effectively going round in circles and as such is not a model for a romance quest.[266] He and his companions, however, stop at many fantastic places en route and some of the exotic elements of the landscape through which the monks pass have certainly filtered into romance narratives.[267]

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[264] *Sir Tristrem*, ll. 1145-50. (Lupack suggests that 'yare' at l. 1150 is a verb, meaning 'prepare'.) In the *Tristrams Saga*, the author makes it even more clear that Tristram is putting himself in the hands of God, since the hero wishes to go away to 'wherever God in his sublime mercy may let me come to land in accordance with my need' (p. 45). By contrast, Gottfried rationalises the voyage by having Tristan deliberately set out to Ireland, which he knows to be the only place he can be cured (pp. 138-9).

[265] See *The Voyage of St Brendan: Representative Versions of the Legend in English Translation*, ed. by W.R.J. Barron and Glyn S. Burgess (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002).

[266] Cooper remarks that the monks experience spiritual progression rather than geographical movement: 'Their recurrent visits to the same places mark the cyclical time of the liturgical year, time measured as space, the unmeasured wastes of the Atlantic mapped like the calendar'; *The English Romance*, p. 125.

[267] Cooper, for example, suggests the legend of St Brendan as a source for the magical fruit and precious stones that Huon carries with him on his self-steering ship in *Huon of Burdeux*; *The English Romance*, p. 125.

A journey in a rudderless boat can therefore act simultaneously as a dramatic narrative device and also as a spiritual experience, in which God's power is demonstrated by the craft being brought safely to land. In terms of the inability of those on board such a ship to control their direction or speed, the rudderless boat bears obvious similarities with the enchanted ship of romance. The most obvious difference, however, is that the rudderless boat is a trial endured almost exclusively by women and children, while it is rare to see anyone but the hero travelling in an enchanted vessel.

Enchanted Ships

The romance motif of the enchanted boat is a development of the strongly-held undercurrent of belief that to set to sea is to place oneself into the hands of God (or gods). Such craft propel and steer themselves, apparently independent of any human influence, and thereby seem related to the self-moving boats of hagiography.[268] Unlike religious figures like St Brendan, however, whose spiritual journeying is directed by God, these vessels are frequently controlled by fairies, female necromancers or other, unknown, supernatural forces. While such female figures often have benevolent motives (having perhaps fallen in love with the hero), they can also use their powers to more sinister ends.

Morgan le Fay falls into this latter category when she uses characteristic trickery in devising a magical ship to trap King Arthur in Malory's *Morte Darthur*.[269] Arthur is lured on board through his curiosity, along with his companions, King Uryence and Accolon, when he sees

> ... before hym in a grete water a lytyll shippe all apparayled with sylke downe to the watir. And the shippe cam ryght unto them and landed on the sandis. Than Arthure wente to the banke and loked in and saw none erthely creature therein.
>
> 'Sirs,' seyde the kynge, 'com thens and let us se what is in this shippe.'[270]

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[268] For examples of self-moving boats in hagiography that predate the earliest examples in secular literature, see Phillips Barry, 'The Magic Boat', *The Journal of American Folk-Lore*, 28 (1915), 195-8.
[269] For this episode, Malory works quite closely from his source, the *Suite du Merlin*, II, 173-91.
[270] *Malory*, I, 137.

Although it initially appears deserted, as is typical of the enchanted ship, twelve damsels subsequently materialise to serve the three men with dinner and then lead them to bedchambers. In the morning each man awakes to find that he is no longer on the ship but has been mysteriously transported as he slept: Uryence is at home in bed, Arthur is in a prison and Accolon finds himself by the side of a well. Accolon instantly declares that 'thes damysels in this shippe hath betrayed us. They were fendis and no women'.[271] The ship has been part of an illusion and has magically repositioned the three characters to suit the schemes of Morgan le Fay.[272] It transports the three knights, but not in a conventional way; this magical ship is just a front for the workings of a dangerous enchantment, intended ultimately to lead to Arthur's death.

More benign enchanted (or apparently enchanted) ships are crucial to the narratives of two romance texts in particular: *Partonope of Blois* and Marie de France's *Guigemar*.[273] Both of these feature otherworldly ships that direct the action of the tale by moving the hero back and forth between two, quite separate, places. In *Guigemar*, the ship appears at timely moments for both the hero and his lover. Its first appearance is shortly after Guigemar has been injured and told that he can only be healed by a lady with whom he is in love. Since Guigemar has never fallen in love before, he wanders away from home aimlessly, although it is soon clear that his steps are guided by fate.

When he comes across the ship, it immediately seems unusual to Guigemar: he is 'mult pensis' [perturbed], because he has never known a ship to dock in this place before.[274] The vessel is highly ornate:

> Mult esteit bien apparillee.
> Defors e dedenz fu peiee:
> Nuls hum n'i pout trover jointure;
> N'i out cheville ne closture
> Ki ne fust tute d'ebenus;
> Suz ciel n'at or ki vaille plus.
> La veille fu tute de seie,
> Mult est bele ki la depleie.

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[271] *Malory*, I, 140.

[272] Cooper describes Morgan as 'something of a specialist' in magical boats, although she by no means always uses them maliciously; see *The English Romance*, p. 134. In *Floriant et Florete*, for example, Morgan gives the hero a beautifully adorned, unsinkable boat that will go wherever it is commanded; *Floriant et Florete*, ed. by Harry F. Williams (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1947), ll. 842-930.

[273] A more detailed analysis and summary of *Partonope of Blois* can be found in Chapter Four.

[274] *Guigemar* in Marie de France, *Lais*, ed. by Ewert and Burgess, l. 161.

> [The ship was fully prepared for departure, caulked inside and out in such a way that it was impossible to detect any joints. There was no peg or deck-rail which was not made of ebony. No gold on earth was worth more and the sail was made entirely of silk, very beautiful when unfurled.][275]

The ship is not merely rich but crafted to such a high standard that it appears to be supernatural and must have been made, at least partly, by enchantment. Mickel argues, rightly I think, that Marie intended the boat to be instantly recognisable to the reader as a magic element and goes on to propose that 'not the least of these indications is the choice of wood, ebony'.[276] He continues by asserting that 'no ordinary boat could be constructed of a wood which was too heavy to float'. Although Mickel may be overanalysing Marie's selection of boat-building materials, it is certainly clear that this ship is magical and highly mysterious, and its origin is never explained. On board is a beautifully crafted bed, of gold, cypress wood and ivory, and there are two golden candelabra at the prow of the ship bearing lighted candles. Guigemar expects to find people on the ship, but it is deserted. When the pain from his wound causes him to rest on the bed for a while, he fails to notice, until too late, that

> La nef est ja en halte mer,
> Od lui s'en vat delivrement;
> Bon orét out e suëf vent.[277]
>
> [The ship was already on the high seas, speeding quickly away with him, the wind favourable and blowing gently.]

The similarities with *Partonope of Blois* are plain to see: in each story the hero finds a richly appointed, deserted ship, falls asleep in a bed on board and awakens only to discover that he is now at sea. Partonope and Guigemar share similar emotions, firstly of amazement and then fear as they find themselves out at sea, in a boat that is apparently sailing itself, and powerless to do anything except call upon God for help. The ships ultimately take each character to a place where he will find a lover. The principal difference, however, is that Partonope's journey is entirely orchestrated by that lover, Melior. She has caused the hero to be lured through the forest in pursuit of a boar

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[275] *Guigemar*, ll. 153-60.
[276] Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr, 'Guigemar's Ebony Boat', *Cultura Neolatina*, 37 (1977), 9-15 (p. 12).
[277] *Guigemar*, ll. 192-4.

to the site where he came across the ship, designed by her to carry him to her land. Although skilled in necromancy, Melior mainly practises the art of illusion and in the end it seems that the sailors have only been invisible, rather than the ship actually being able to steer and propel itself as in *Guigemar*. Indeed, as Partonope embarks on his final voyage in the ship, back to Blois, after he has betrayed his lady's trust and broken her spells by using the magic lantern, we are told that

> There alle redy þe shyppe fownde he,
> Where-In he wes wonte to passe þe see.
> The Shypmen to hym gan shrewdely speke,
> Prayde Gode þe deuylle hys necke schulde breke.[278]

This is certainly the same ship in which Partonope has become accustomed to travel back and forth between Blois and Ile d'Or, only now the hostile sailors are very much in evidence.

The boat in *Guigemar*, despite the obvious similarities, is actually of an entirely different supernatural nature. Illingworth tries to explain this by arguing that the 'first section of *Guigemar* appears to be an adaptation of an Other World induction story which described how a fairy lured a chosen mortal to her domain across the sea'.[279] His theory is a possibility but seems unlikely since the character of the lady of *Guigemar* is so far removed from the pro-active, fairy-like Melior of *Partonope*. Guigemar's lady is trapped by her husband, powerless to change her joyless life, until Guigemar is, by chance, washed up inside her 'prison'. The magic that is clearly at work in the form of the enchanted ship is completely exterior to the characters of the *lai*. They are certainly aided by it, but have no means of harnessing or controlling it. Other critics have suggested Celtic parallels for Guigemar's ship, but Sobecki contends that 'no ship with similar properties has been found that predated Marie de France's *lais* and could have provided the inspiration for her ship'.[280] He also rejects the Old French *Partonopeus de Blois* (composed sometime during the last third of the twelfth century) as a source, and

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[278] *The Middle English Versions of Partonope of Blois*, ed. by A. Trampe Bödtker, EETS ES 109 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1912; repr. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), ll. 6391-4.
[279] R.N. Illingworth, 'Celtic Tradition and the *Lai* of *Guigemar*', *Medium Ævum*, 31 (1962), 176-87 (p. 177).
[280] Sebastian I. Sobecki, 'A Source for the Magical Ship in the *Partonopeus de Blois* and Marie de France's *Guigemar*', *Notes and Queries*, 48 (2001), 220-22 (p. 220).

tentatively suggests that it is much more likely that Marie was influenced by Benedeit's Anglo-Norman *Voyage de Saint Brendan*.[281]

Whatever the sources and relationship between the two texts, though, the ships of *Partonope* and *Guigemar* play a similar structural role, in dividing the text into sections. In each narrative, the ship bridges the gap between two distinct places. Partonope makes six voyages – three in each direction between Blois and Ile d'Or – which reflect the way in which he vacillates between the influence of his invisible lover, Melior, and that of his mother; between romantic love on the one hand and the desire to live an active knightly life on the other. The impression is given of a journey to the otherworld, even though Ile d'Or ultimately turns out not to be so strange after all, once Melior's enchantments have been broken.

Later in *Partonope of Blois*, the hero is rescued from madness and his desire to kill himself by yet another ship, this one clearly unenchanted and belonging to Melior's sister, Urake. She takes him to a small island, Salence, where he can recuperate in private. Once fully recovered, and eagerly anticipating the tournament that offers him the opportunity to win back Melior, Partonope embarks upon his final sea journey of the romance. On this occasion, he chooses to go sailing as a pleasurable distraction, in order to kill time. Initially the conditions are favourable for his jaunt, but when he tries to turn back towards Salence, the wind has risen and is blowing strongly in the opposite direction:

> Shipmen seide they couthe not se
> But þat they moste serve þe see.[282]

The sailors are powerless to prevent the boat being driven off course, to Tenedon, where they and Partonope are all taken prisoner.

By contrast to his earlier journeys in Melior's apparently enchanted ship, Partonope finds this voyage far more open to chance. He is no longer under the protective, or restrictive, influence of his lady but is, like the conventional knight-hero,

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[281] Sobecki adds that 'it could well be that her magical boat was a cognate Breton form of an Irish commonplace, which she also might have come across in Benedeit's *Voyage*'; see 'A source for the Magical Ship', p. 222.
[282] *Partonope of Blois*, ll. 9192-3.

now proceeding to whatever adventure the boat of romance takes him. Such adventures, or obstacles, are naturally surmountable and so Partonope ultimately rejoins his lover after a short period of wandering and proving himself. One characteristic of the enchanted ships in both *Partonope* and *Guigemar* is that each pursues a very direct and unproblematic course, immune, it seems, to storms or becalming.

In *Guigemar* especially, the boat is extremely providential, appearing exactly when the hero and heroine have greatest need. In the boat's final appearance in the *lai*, Guigemar's lover is saved from suicidal despair when she sees the ship:

> Atachie fu al rochier
> U ele se voleit neier
>
> [it was attached to the rock where she intended to drown herself].[283]

She climbs on board instead, swoons and is carried unconscious (a little like the hero on his first journey in the ship) towards an eventual reunion with Guigemar. It is very rare for a woman to be passively transported by enchanted ship in this way, and this further highlights the way in which Marie de France uses the motif in her *lai* differently from examples in other romances. She makes no attempt to explain the supernatural power that guides the boat: it is clear that it is independent of both central characters yet acts to promote the interests of both. The unwritten gender rule of other enchanted romance boats – namely that men travel in the boats while women direct the movement – is ignored by Marie. In *Guigemar*, since there is no visible person controlling the vessel, the ship is able to move outside the usual conventions of gender-roles.

Interestingly, Quinn traces a link between the enchanted ship sent to the hero by a fairy mistress, as in *Partonope of Blois*, and the Grail ship in *La Queste del Saint Graal* and Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal*. Galahad twice visits the Grail ship, which belonged to Solomon and whose symbolic appointments were arranged by Solomon's wife. Quinn claims that

> Solomon's wife sends the ship to the hero, not to bring him to her, but to link her time with his, to convey to him a message of doctrine, not of love.[284]

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[283] *Guigemar*, ll. 679-80.

The ship here links not two distinct places, but two separate times. Although not enchanted in the same manner as the secular examples in *Partonope* and *Guigemar*, the Grail ship is evidently supernatural and demonstrates yet another kind of narrative device in action. It resembles not only the secular enchanted boat but also the topos of the rudderless boat, which sails under God's direction. The Grail ship exceeds both of the other boat motifs, however, since it is a physical object that is miraculously able to sail from one time and space to another, entirely separate one, and thereby transcend normal rules of nature. In so doing, it becomes an enduring religious symbol that bears physical witness not only to the unique powers of the Christian God, which are external to the conventional laws of time, but also to the continuity of the faith between generations of people. The faith has passed from generation to generation, from Old to New Testament, just as the marvellous ship has done.

Elsewhere, enchanted – or apparently enchanted – ships are few and far between in medieval romance. There is a distinctly unusual example, however, in *Les Mervelles de Rigomer* during the episode in which Gawain is in the castle of Wanglent, a place constructed as a trap, in imitation of Rigomer. Gawain is successfully battling with ever-increasing numbers of knights until he unwittingly steps on a certain plank that tips him into the moat:

> Ensi ert la cose avenue:
> Une nef i avoit venue,
> Qui mout estoit bien atornee,
> Aparellie et aornee
> De tant avoir q'il avoit ens
> Et de tous rices garnemens.
> Enmi le nef avoit .i. lit
> Qui fais estoit par grant delit.
> De rices coutes d'auqueton,
> De blans dras et de siglatons
> Et de tires et de cendax
> Et de pailes imperïaux
> Estoit aornee la nes
> Et par delonc et par delés.[285]

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[284] Esther Casier Quinn, 'The Quest of Seth, Solomon's Ship and the Grail', *Traditio*, 21 (1965), 185-222 (pp. 197-8).
[285] *Rigomer*, ll. 11,957-70.

> [Then a strange thing happened: a very beautiful, finely rigged ship appeared, filled with great treasures and brimming over with all kinds of rich and precious garments. In the middle of the ship there was a bed which had been very richly prepared. The ship was decked out all over, in every last nook and cranny, with rich silken cloths, bolts of material woven with gold and silver thread, fine satins, and white gossamer draperies.]

The spectacular ship arrives, like the ship in *Guigemar*, at a very timely moment, saving Gawain from drowning. Although the whole experience is strange and unexpected, Gawain takes it immediately in his stride, since this ship also comes complete with beautiful ladies on board. He therefore adopts his traditional womanising role and enjoys food, drink and 'some fun' with a damsel. After some time they come to shore downriver where Gawain rejoins his former companion, an Irish knight. The women then explain to Gawain that he is the only man ever to have escaped from the castle of Wanglent. One of them adds: 'Et vos mëismes sans äie, / Jou cuit, n'en escapisiés mie' [And I think even you could never have been freed from it if you did not have some help].[286] The fairy damsels come out of nowhere to aid Gawain with their magical ship, and increase the sense developed throughout the romance that Gawain is the supreme hero and the man predestined to break the evil customs of Rigomer. He cannot, it seems, be harmed. The romance makes no attempt whatsoever to justify the fairies' intervention or to render this part of the tale at all logical. Its author plays with many elements of literary tradition (such as the motif of the magic ship) and amplifies them. He evidently enjoys the marvellous and the inexplicable and liberally adds a bewilderingly eclectic mixture of supernatural elements into his tale, without feeling any need to explain or rationalise.

At times, *Huon of Burdeux* is written in a similar style, particularly in the sections that deal with travel over water, which seem to inspire the author to particularly lively and outlandish imaginings. Huon encounters an enchanted ship after an extended period of unlucky sea travel during which he has been blown off course twice, caught in a storm and shipwrecked. After escaping from the Island of Adamant, his fortunes seem at last to have changed as he finds himself in a paradisiacal place, home to the Tree of Youth. An angel instructs him as to where he can find a ship, which he must

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[286] *Rigomer*, ll. 12,031-2.

allow to go where it will. The vessel is 'so fayre that he [Huon] was therof abasshyd', lavishly adorned as it is with gold, ivory and precious stones. Moreover, once Huon is on board it goes 'as faste as thoughe a byrde had flowen'.[287] Despite its marvellous nature, though, Huon's journey is not plain sailing. He suffers temperatures of extreme cold and a tempest in which red hot iron bars fall into the water around him, dangerously close to his vessel, before the ship runs aground in shallow water. Huon has to use gravel (which happens to be intermingled with precious stones) as ballast to refloat the ship. Despite all these perils, and Huon's fears for his life, the ship eventually does bring Huon safely back to civilisation and it is apparent that no ordinary boat would have survived the rigours of the hellish journey. Even the grounding of the ship proves to have been fortuitous, and perhaps pre-ordained, since along with the gravel, Huon has scooped up vast quantities of precious stones which are not only possessed of great monetary value but also have various useful magical properties.

Huon of Burdeux contains a strange mixture of Christian beliefs alongside its portrayal of the fantastic. Oberon, the fairy king, is a staunch Christian and Huon's adherence to his faith is clearly presented as one of his key qualities as a hero. The author is unafraid of mixing religion, myth and pure fantasy so that in the episode described above Huon is given a boat by an angel and seen to travel through a watery 'Valley of Death'. His adventures, however, are only superficially a spiritual journey, as Huon is apparently oblivious to the religious connotations and does not interpret any of this as a religious experience. He remains solely concerned with returning safely to Bordeaux in order to aid his besieged wife, child and city. Later too, Huon finds that his only means of escape from a desert place where he has encountered Cain, suffering eternal punishment for his sins, is on a boat sailed by a devil.[288] The landscape of *Huon of Burdeux* transcends time as its characters interact with ancient biblical figures. Just as the characters intermingle, settings that are indebted to traditional descriptions of paradise and hell are also worked into the romance. All sources seem to have been

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[287] *Huon of Burdeux*, p. 439.

[288] Huon's meeting with Cain recalls that of St Brendan with Judas Iscariot; both biblical sinners are located in places cut off by the sea and occupy a timeless space in which each has been condemned to suffer eternal damnation.

equally valid in the creation of this fiction, which recognises no boundaries between the spiritual and the more traditional landscapes of romance. Ships are a convenient device by which Huon is taken across from one piece of quasi-biblical setting to the next: such places are geographical extremities and as such can only be reached by setting to sea and sailing into the unknown.

Enchanted ships, then, generally aid their passengers or enable them to reach extremes that there is no other way of attaining. Cooper observes that the motif of the magic ship contrived by a powerful woman was not as popular in Anglo-Norman and English romance as in French:

> The main reason for this seems to have been the greater insistence in English romance on some degree of plausibility, both for its boats and its women. Preservation in an open boat is unlikely but possible, especially in an age of faith. The self-steering magic ship is pure fantasy, such as is typically an element of French or Italian romance.[289]

Nonetheless there are, as can be seen above, a small number of Middle English romances that are translations or adaptations of Old French sources which feature the topos of the enchanted ship. It may not have been particularly common but survives in texts such as *Huon of Burdeux*, *Partonope of Blois* and the *Morte Darthur*, and thereby contributes to the overall impression given by medieval romance of the sea as a mysterious space, one within which unpredictable supernatural powers may well be at work.

Boats and the Dead

The final category of romance boats that I wish to discuss is the regularly-occurring phenomenon of vessels carrying corpses. It seems likely that ancient practices of sea or boat burial influenced the popularity of literary images of boats transporting the dead. Ships for the dead are a common enough concept in many cultures, and the classical myth of the boatman, Charon, who ferried the souls of the dead across the Styx would have been particularly well-known in the Middle Ages. In Britain, a history of ship burials, of which the seventh-century Sutton Hoo site is the

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[289] Cooper, *The English Romance*, p. 130.

foremost example, may also have been influential.[290] Although this ritualistic form of burial is evidently a superstitious act, the Sutton Hoo remains also reveal a fascinating attention to practical detail: the dead man is provided with an axe-hammer, for mending the boat, and some spare pieces of tar in case of leaks. As Martin Carver notes,

> The placing of the burial in a 'cabin' on board a ship evokes the allegory of a voyage, in this case a voyage to another world from which the traveller was never to return.[291]

Carver is also, understandably, reminded of *Beowulf*, which opens with the death of the great Danish king, Shield Sheafson, whose body is placed in a boat accompanied by treasure and weapons and then allowed to drift freely on the waves, like the rudderless boat of romance, with no one knowing what will become of it.[292] In romances, however, the dead bodies in ships differ from the living characters in rudderless boats because their journeys are always purposeful and directed.

The famous scene of King Arthur's departure after his final, disastrous battle particularly evokes the image of ship burial, even though Arthur is alive when carried on board by Bedevere. As Malory describes the scene, 'a lytyll barge wyth many fayre ladyes in hit' awaits the mortally wounded king.[293] Although Arthur tells Bedevere that he is going to Avalon to be healed of his wound, there will be no cure for him in this world and Arthur drifts out of sight to his death. Arthur's passage is not, however, typical of the romance theme of the dead body in a boat. Romance ships do not usually carry their dead into another world, but call attention to the continued presence of the dead person in the world of the living. Such craft make possible a form of continued communication and are not simply transportation for the corpse. The boats of the dead

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[290] It is not known whether ship burial came first to England or Scandinavia but it is clear that it retained its popularity for a much longer period of time in Scandinavia. Thus we find 'the most well-known function of the ship in Old Norse religion [is] ... as the death-ship, the ship that takes the dead from this world to the other'; see Jens Peter Schjødt, 'The Ship in Old Norse Mythology and Religion', in *The Ship as Symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia. Papers from an International Research Seminar at the Danish National Museum, Copenhagen, 5th-7th May 1994*, ed. by Ole Crumlin-Pederson and Birgitte Munch Thye (Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark, 1995), pp. 20-4 (p. 23). Schjødt explains that this does not mean that the dead were necessarily thought to have to cross water in order to arrive at the otherworld, but that the ship probably simply symbolised the vast distance between this world and the next for a culture in which long distances were travelled by ship (p. 24).

[291] Martin Carver, *Sutton Hoo: Burial Ground of Kings?* (London: British Museum Press, 1998), p. 128.

[292] See *Beowulf*, ed. by Michael Alexander (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), ll. 26-53.

[293] *Malory*, III, 1240.

sometimes, but not always, mysteriously propel themselves and thus could also be seen as enchanted. They have no malicious intent attached to them but often their purpose is to expose treachery or wrongdoing.

One particularly famous example is that of the Demoiselle d'Escalot in *La Mort Artu* (who equates to Malory's Maid of Astolat in the section that Vinaver terms *The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere*).[294] The dying Demoiselle wishes her body to be sailed to Arthur's court as a dramatic reproach to Lancelot who spurned her love and therefore caused her to die of sorrow. In her hand she bears a letter, explaining her situation. As Virginie Greene argues, the boat carries the symbolic weight of the story – it is not only a means of transport but a grave, a bed and a messenger:

> By carrying her and her letter to Arthur, it also allows her to speak, giving voice to the dead. In a certain sense, this boat is an 'automaton', but it is also a miniature boat, *une nacele*... a word derived from *navicella* the diminutive of *navis* [boat], in the same manner that *pucelle* comes from *pulicella* the diminutive of *puella* [maiden].[295]

There is no boatman in the French text and, although one is added by Malory in his retelling, 'no worde wolde [he] speke'.[296] The boat comes to embody the dead woman and communicates to the outside world on her behalf. Greene further notes that in illustrations of this scene the Demoiselle is not always visible: in such examples, the 'accusing corpse' is 'represented by the whole boat'.[297] The boat is united with the dead body to such an extent that an image of the boat alone is enough to convey the essence of the scene.

Elsewhere in romances, dead knights are similarly laid out in a boat when they have been wrongfully killed. Like the Demoiselle, the dead knight usually bears a letter, revealing the nature of his death, and the finder of his corpse then has a moral obligation to organise revenge. Antoinette Saly points out the examples of Brangemuer, a knight whose corpse is pulled by a swan beneath Arthur's balcony in the *Première continuation de Perceval*, and the hero of the *Vengeance Raguidel* whose body is also

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[294] See the *Lancelot-Grail*, IV, 113.
[295] Greene, 'The Bed and the Boat', p. 58.
[296] *Malory*, II, 1096. The *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*, which Malory may have used as a source, also has no boatman; *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* in *King Arthur's Death*, ed. by Benson, ll. 964-99.
[297] Greene, 'The Bed and the Boat', p. 57.

found in a boat, demanding retribution.[298] The topos also appears in the *Morte Darthur*, marking the start of a new quest for Palomydes in *The Book of Sir Tristram*.[299] The body in the boat here belongs to Harmaunce, king of the Red City, whose dead hand grasps a letter requesting that a good knight avenge him by challenging the two brothers responsible for his untimely demise. The sailors on board warn Tristram before he takes the letter:

> wyte you well that no man shall take that lettir and rede hit but yf he be a good knyght, and that he woll faythfully promyse to revenge his dethe, and ellis shall there no knyght se that lettir opyn.[300]

The vessel in this instance performs the additional, practical, function of taking Palomydes back to the Red City where he is able to avenge the dead man. The situation of Perceval's sister, in *La Queste del Saint Graal* (and the corresponding Grail section in Malory), is also comparable, although significantly her corpse does not so much recriminate as bear testament to the events that led to her voluntary death. Perceval's sister's body is placed in a boat and put out to sea, to float where it will, until Lancelot later discovers the boat and reads the letter that explains her sacrificial death.

In all these examples, the bed is the prominent piece of furniture on the boat, holding the corpse up for all onlookers to see. With reference to the Demoiselle d'Escalot, Greene comments that

> details call attention to the similarities between a boat, a bed, and a tomb, between travelling by boat, being asleep, and being dead, ultimately questioning the boundary between the dead and the living.[301]

This boundary is, it seems, deliberately blurred in *Guigemar* too, when the hero is discovered asleep in a bed on the enchanted ship, with two candles burning over him. It is unsurprising that the two women who find him believe him to be dead, since the composition of this scene so greatly resembles those described above. As Saly suggests, 'La nef féerique est ici en quelque sorte une nef funéraire comparable à celles

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[298] Antoinette Saly, 'Observations sur le lai de *Guigemar*', in *Mélanges de langue et littérature françaises du moyen age et de la renaissance offerts à M. Charles Foulon*, 2 vols (Rennes: Université de Haute-Bretagne, 1980), I, 329-39 (p. 335).

[299] Malory closely follows his source for this episode; see *Le Roman de Tristan en prose*, ed. by Philippe Ménard and others, 9 vols (Geneva: Droz, 1987-97), V, 159.

[300] *Malory*, II, 701.

[301] Greene, 'The Bed and the Boat', p. 59.

que nous retrouverons tant de fois dans la littérature arthurienne'.[302] The early date (late twelfth century) of *Guigemar* in the romance tradition, though, indicates that the image of the corpse in the boat was not one that originated with the romance genre but was already commonplace. It is impossible to trace a specific source, just as it is impossible to cite the first example of the myth that the sea will not tolerate a sinner.

Characters in romance who travel in boats after their deaths continue to 'speak' to the living, and the boat allows them to remain eerily mobile. As we have seen, in certain romance examples, where there is no boatman and the boat is endowed with supernatural powers to steer and move itself, the vessel ceases to be a mere inanimate object. Body and craft to some degree merge, the boat apparently obeying the will of the dead person as it travels to the place where the corpse, and its story, will be discovered. The boat becomes an extension of the dead body, acting in its interests.

An interesting analogous situation can be found in *King Horn*, in which young Horn, still a child, displays a belief in the almost supernatural powers that ships may possess. His superstitious attitude is perhaps founded in the tradition of boats that magically transport the dead around without any human intervention. The episode occurs when Horn miraculously arrives on the shores of an unknown land after being cast off from his homeland in a rudderless boat by pagan invaders who sought his death. He personifies the boat in which he was set adrift, seeing it as a messenger, able to travel under its own volition and to convey a communication back to those he has left behind:

> [Go nu] schup bi flode;
> Daies haue þu gode.
> Bi þe se brinke
> No water þe n'adrinke
> [Softe mote þu sterie]
> [No water þe ne derie].
> ȝef þu cume to Suddenne,
> Gret thu wel of myne kenne:
> Gret þu wel my moder,
> Godhild quen þe gode;
> And seie þe paene kyng,
> [Driȝtes] wiþer[l]ing,
> þat ihc, hol and fer,
> On lond a[m] riued her;

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[302] Saly, 'Observations sur le lai de *Guigemar*', p. 334. Saly goes on to propose that, to Marie de France, Guigemar effectively is a 'dead' man because he is insensible to love (p. 335).

And seie þat h[e] schal fonde
Þe d[uþ] of myne honde![303]

Horn's apostrophe is not of course meant literally, but captures beautifully the essence of the child's longing to return home and redress his wrongs by imagining that the boat could indeed be blessed with the supernatural ability to be the herald of his eventual return. While the ship floats away, Horn weeps as he is effectively parted from his last material connection with his homeland.

It is interesting that, alongside the images of the dead body in the boat, another ancient tradition also, somewhat paradoxically, exists: the belief that if a person dies during a voyage the corpse must be disposed of at once or else it will bring misfortune (generally in the form of a violent storm) to the ship. The *Historia Apollonii* illustrates this practice when Apollonius's wife appears to die during childbirth while she and her husband are travelling over the sea to Tyre. The sailors on board are typically superstitious and insist that the 'corpse' be removed from the ship. As Gower tells it in the *Confessio Amantis*:

The Maister Schipman cam and preide
With othre suche as be therinne,
And sein that he mai nothing winne
Ayein the deth, bot thei him rede,
He be wel war and tak hiede,
The See be weie of his nature
Receive mai no creature
Withinne himself as forto holde,
The which is ded: forthi thei wolde,
As thei conseilen al aboute,
The dede body casten oute.
For betre it is, thei seiden alle,
That it of hire so befalle,
Than if thei scholden alle spille.[304]

Apollonius, although unwilling to part with his wife, accepts the sailors' logic as reasonable and true and has a coffin made, in which he allows his wife to be cast into the waves. The motif also appears in medieval retellings of the life of Mary Magdalene,

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[303] *King Horn*, ll. 141-56. In the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman *Horn*, there is no such address by Horn, since his boat is smashed to pieces against the rocks upon arrival; see *The Romance of Horn by Thomas*, ed. by Mildred K. Pope, 2 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955), ll. 215-23.

[304] *Confessio Amantis*, Book 8, ll. 1084-97. Macaulay notes that lines 1089ff. appear to mean 'that the sea will necessarily cast a dead body up on the shore, and therefore that they must throw it out of the ship, otherwise the ship itself will be cast ashore with it'.

in which the King of Marseilles's wife dies in childbirth on board a ship (and in this case she is actually dead). The king is loath to throw the corpse overboard and so the sailors reluctantly agree to drop anchor at nearby land so that the body can be left there.[305] Despite the undoubted familiarity of this superstition in the medieval period, it is nonetheless not a theme that romance writers seem to have been interested in using.

Conclusion

Against expectations that medieval romance might be a landlocked genre, with its knights riding on horseback over solid ground the vast majority of the time, there are a surprisingly large number of significant episodes that occur on water. Some romances undoubtedly do have much in common with the attitude shown in the earlier medieval epic, that sea crossings were routine, usually uneventful and primarily functional. A voyage by ship can be especially useful for moving characters around over large distances swiftly and for crossing into different countries, or even other worlds. Other romances, however, demonstrate a much more active engagement with the sea as a setting in its own right, rather than seeing it as a bridging element between adventures or far-flung places. Their island situation may have encouraged English writers to think about the literary potential of journeys over the sea, as Field suggests, although many French authors seem to have found equal interest in working boats and ships into their narratives.[306]

The topoi of the rudderless boat and the enchanted ship – because of their freedom of movement and consequent potential for adventure – seem most characteristic of the romance interest in the subject, yet storms too are often used as a ready-made dramatic set-piece. Most medieval romances have a Christian framework and so literary storms can be life-threatening or, alternatively, providential. Either way, the storm is usually interpreted as a deliberate act of God, responding to the specific behaviour of the human protagonists. The sea features in romance not only as a

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[305] See *Mary Magdalene* in *The Digby Plays*, ed. by F.J. Furnivall, EETS ES 70 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1896). Miraculously, the king finds his wife and child alive and well when he revisits the spot some time later.

[306] See Field, 'The King over the Water', pp. 41-53.

medium for God's retribution, expressed through tempests unleashed upon the wicked, but also as an agent of divine good will and deliverance. Marie de France shows just how well-established this conventional way of thinking was even in the twelfth century, by turning it on its head in *Eliduc*. Romance authors worked from a long tradition of thought, including the ideas that the sea cannot tolerate a sinner or a dead body on board a ship. They also inherited a wealth of powerful associations and notions, ranging from ideas of the 'ship of state' to the 'sea of life' and the Church as a ship upon it. Such ideas are frequently present as undercurrents of thought in the romance texts.

There is only a limited degree of realism, as can be seen by the scarce references to piracy, but there are nonetheless a variety of interesting literary formulae in evidence. Beliefs about God's protection of those at sea were strongly dramatised, and it is as if the sea was viewed as a particularly good stage upon which to see divine power at work. By contrast, Man's powerlessness is of course emphasised. Romances are, however, often primarily secular texts and, as such, they were also interested in other possibilities that the sea and ships opened up. Fairy mistresses with enchanted ships and dead bodies returning to cry for vengeance are just two of the non-religious themes that appear to have been very popular in both French and English romance. The enchanted ships, in particular, reveal the human passenger (usually a knight) to be just as incapable of steering his/her own course as if in a rudderless boat. In this scenario, though, it is not just to God's will that a knight must submit (although, like Partonope and Guigemar, his first reaction is often to pray for divine assistance), but to the adventure itself, whatever form it may take. Romance authors specifically moulded boats and ships into part of the fabric of chivalric romance. A ship is not fundamental to a knight in the same way as a horse, but voyages over water complement the traditional act of setting out overland on horseback. Protagonists frequently do not deliberately choose to set sail, and yet the passage by ship ultimately tends to symbolise progress for the hero or heroine towards his/her goal.

Chapter Three: Tents and Pavilions

> These tents which are now pitched, whenever I see them
> lying collapsed on the ground and repositioned,
> I think of the temporary sojourn of human life,
> and the mutability of the tent of the earthly body.[307]

The focus of my study now turns from the horse and the ship, actual means of transport, to the tent, a useful accessory for the traveller. Tents and pavilions are often seen to facilitate travel in romance, by bringing comfort and civilisation even to the wildest countryside spaces. They are synonymous with movement and are essentially a form of temporary, mobile accommodation. As the poem above suggests, however, the tent has also often been seen as powerfully symbolic through the ages; it plays an important part in martial history (right down to present-day warfare), and is a significant cultural artefact. In medieval romance, tents and pavilions are numerous and provide a common backdrop to sieges and tournaments. Perhaps because of this very familiarity, tents are a type of space that has remained long unexplored by literary critics. This chapter therefore seeks to define and analyse the role of tents and pavilions in romances, with reference to the historical use of tents in the Middle Ages which both influenced, and was influenced by, literary representations. In both romance and reality, tents have an ambivalent or multifaceted status: on the one hand they are highly practical and a key piece of equipment for military campaigns, while on the other they are extremely decorative and eloquently make a statement about the power and social position of the tent owner. A study of a cross-section of Middle English romances, and some important Old French texts, shows clearly that there are four main scenarios in which tents feature. These will be explored in turn below, in addition to a more general discussion of the symbolic and cultural semantics of tents in the genre.

I use the terms 'tent' and 'pavilion' more or less interchangeably in this chapter. In Middle English, as in modern day usage, the two nouns most commonly found denoting a tent are *tent(e)* and *pavilon*, although according to the *MED hale* can – in

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[307] This is a translation (by Anderson and Jeffreys) of a short poem from the Byzantine Empire by the hypothetical anonymous author, 'Manganeios Prodromos', dating probably from 1143-1151, which may have been a statement embroidered on a tent. See J.C. Anderson and M.J. Jeffreys, 'The Decoration of the Sevastokratorissa's Tent', *Byzantion. Revue internationale des études Byzantines*, 64 (1994), 8-18 (p. 13).

certain instances – also mean a 'temporary structure for housing, entertaining, eating meals, etc.; an open pavilion, a tent, etc.'. This latter usage, however, is not particularly common. *Tent(e)* and *pavilon* each possess a similar range of meaning and do not equate exactly to their modern English counterparts. Both words can indicate anything from a tent used as temporary shelter in a military encampment to a decorative pavilion set up on a festive occasion. *Pavilon* is employed a little more frequently than *tent(e)* to describe a large or elaborate pavilion, used perhaps for a tournament or hunting party, but this is certainly not always the case. The Old French terminology is very similar, even though there are three principal words for tent: *pavillon* (or *paveillon*), *tref* (or *tre*) and *tente* (or *tante*).[308] Lucien Foulet notes:

> ... voilà trois substantifs qui désignent le même objet. Il est possible que chacun d'eux s'applique à une forme ou à des caractéristiques différentes, mais s'il en est ainsi dans la realité, nos textes nous en font rien savoir: à les livres on a l'impression que ces trois substantifs sont des synonymes tout à fait interchangeables.[309]

Foulet does go on to qualify his statement by remarking that the term *pavillon* is always used for ladies who are named only by a descriptive term such as 'celle du pavillon', 'la pucelle du pavillon' or 'la belle du pavillon'. He further remarks that, although kings or queens often do reside in a *tref* or *tente*, 'il n'en reste pas moins que le pavillon n'est pas seulement une possession, mais qu'il a une individualité qui fait défaut aux deux synonymes'. Somehow, the word *pavillon* conveys a little more grandeur, as is true today in modern English usage.

Due to constraints of space, I have chosen to focus in this chapter upon Middle English romance, and on Malory's *Morte Darthur* in particular, but will also refer to the works of Chrétien de Troyes and other French romances, and occasionally to the *romans antiques*. In so doing, I hope to give an overview of the way in which tents and

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[308] There is, in addition, the word *loge* which can mean an improvised habitation (established, for example, for a travelling court) and can signify, amongst other things, a tent. It thus shares some similarities with the Middle English *hale*. For further information about usage of tent-words in Old French, see André Eskénazi, '*Tref*, *pavellon*, *tante* dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes (BN 794)', in *Et c'est la fin pour quoy sommes ensemble. Hommage à Jean Dufournet*, ed. by Jean-Claude Aubailly and others, 3 vols (Paris: Champion, 1993), III, 549-62.

[309] Lucien Foulet, 'Glossary of the First Continuation', in *The Continuations of the Old French 'Perceval' of Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. by William Roach and Robert H. Ivy, 5 vols (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949-83), III, 221.

pavilions function in chivalric romance. Although tents had long been part of the apparatus of war, most notably for the Romans, the Middle Ages marked the return of the tent to Western Europe after a period of disuse.[310] Philip Drew claims that the 'earliest reappearance of tents on the Western European scene cannot be ascertained exactly, but it is unlikely that they were used before the twelfth century'.[311] The rise in the number of references to, and images of, tents from this time onwards is certainly noticeable. Castellani claims that the description of the hero's tent was a tradition already well established in the *romans antiques*, including *Athis et Prophilias* and the *Roman de Thèbes*.[312] In such texts there is usually a great deal of emphasis placed on the internal decoration: tent panels bear illustrations of myths, biblical tales or classical legends, alongside images of the seasons, the planets, animals or perhaps a *mappa mundi*. While tents remain a very visible set-piece in later chivalric romances, the focus of the description noticeably shifts away from the interior to external features.

In French literature, Petit argues that tent description became a familiar literary motif during the second half of the twelfth century, and she gives a list of examples from a range of different texts, including *chansons de geste* and Chrétien's romances.[313] Elsewhere, chronicles and histories, such as that of Geoffrey of Monmouth, include many references to tents, although not as much elaborate description. Chivalric romances, of both France and England, provide an interesting and coherent group of texts in which tents and pavilions appear in a number of formulaic, but surprisingly varied, situations and will therefore be the focal point of my study.

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[310] By the first century AD, the Roman standard legionaries' tent was a leather, saddle-shaped, *papilio* (butterfly) structure, similar to the medieval pavilion. The English word *pavilion* and Old French *pavillon* indeed derive from the Latin *papilio*.

[311] Philip Drew, *Tensile Architecture* (London: Crosby Lockwood Staples, 1979), p. 109.

[312] Marie-Madeleine Castellani, 'La Description de la tente du roi Bilas dans le roman d'*Athis et Prophilias*', in *Et c'est la fin*, ed. by Aubailly, I, 327-39 (p. 327).

[313] Aimé Petit, 'Le Pavillon d'Alexandre dans le *Roman d'Alexandre* (ms. B. Venise, Museo Civico VI, 665)', *Bien dire et bien aprandre*, 6 (1988), 77-96 (p. 81). For a study of one of the tents of the *chansons de geste*, see Susanne Friede, 'Un héros et sa tente: la tente du sultan dans la *Chanson de Jérusalem*', in *L'Epopée romane*, ed. by Gabriel Bianciotto and Claudio Galderisi (Poitiers: Université de Poitiers, 2002), pp. 673-80. On the sources of the tent descriptions in Old French texts, see Edmond Faral, *Recherches sur les sources latines des contes et romans courtois du moyen âge* (Paris: Champion, 1913), pp. 65ff. and 337-9; and Emmanuèle Baumgartner, 'Peinture et écriture: la description de la tente dans les romans antiques au XIIe siècle', in *Mélanges de littérature médiévale et de linguistique allemande offerts à Wolfgang Spiewok*, ed. by Danielle Buschinger (Amiens: Université de Picardie, 1988), pp. 3-11.

In looking at the range of scenarios in which tents appear in medieval romance, the first issue that I wish to determine is who uses tents and pavilions, and whether there is a division along gender lines. Consequently, I will begin this chapter with a discussion of the sorts of people, and specific romance characters, who are associated with tents. Upon many occasions tents serve simply as temporary accommodation for travellers, but they are by no means limited to this straightforward function. I shall therefore look in more detail at why, and in what contexts, tents and pavilions are used and, in order to facilitate this, I have established four categories into which most of the tents and pavilions of romance fall. These sub-sections are the usage of tents in war, their function at tournaments, the role of the pavilion pitched expressly to signify a knight's wish to joust, and recreational tents and pavilions. In all of these situations I will be aiming to understand the way in which the tents of romance confer certain rights, or a particular image, upon their users and how the tent can circumscribe and transform space.

Travellers and Tents

Despite the fact that one of the key characteristics of a tent is its portability, it is also true that a number of servants are required to carry the camping equipment and to pitch it as required. It is therefore uncommon for a knight errant to stay in a tent, since lodging in a lord's household or a religious house is by far the easiest option for a man wishing to cover ground quickly and unaccompanied except, perhaps, by a squire and a guide. On the infrequent occasions when no suitable abode can be found to welcome the travelling knight, he must sleep out in the open. Such is the lot one night of Chrétien de Troyes's Erec and Enide:

> Chevauchié ont jusqu'a la nuit,
> ne vile ne recet ne virent.
> A l'anuitier lor ostel prirent
> desoz un arbre an une lande.[314]

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[314] Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec and Enide*, ed. by Carleton W. Carroll with an introduction by William W. Kibler (New York: Garland, 1987), ll. 3048-51. All translations of Chrétien's romances are those of D.D.R. Owen in Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances* (London: Dent, 1993), with some minor modifications. For a further example, see Renaut de Beaujeu, *Le Bel Inconnu*, ed. by G. Perrie Williams, CFMA 38 (Paris: Champion, 1929), ll. 735-40: Guinglain and his companions are obliged to spend the

> [They rode all night without finding any town or refuge. When night fell, they sheltered under a tree on a heath.]

There are, however, occasional exceptions; in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, for example, Tristram is unusual in his habitual use of pavilions as he travels to tournaments and I will analyse this in more detail below in the section on tournaments. He also travels with pavilions on his journey to Ireland, during which he is blown off course to England.[315] On this occasion, however, Tristram is engaged in an attempt to arrange the marriage of Isode and King Mark, so his mission is state business, for which one might expect him to be accompanied by at least a small group of attendants.

Aside from Tristram, those who travel equipped with their own tents in the *Morte Darthur* are exclusively either female or kings. In other romances too, there are few examples of people travelling with tents, other than for military reasons. This can be at least partly attributed to the fact that many of these texts focus upon a knight errant who, for the reasons observed above, will not use a tent. In addition to this, journeys are not usually perceived as inherently interesting in romances and are rarely described in much detail as the narrative speeds the characters swiftly on to their destinations. *Sir Tristrem* contains one exception, in its depiction of Isonde bringing pavilions with her and having them set up as she travels; similarly, in *Ipomadon*, Imayne has her pavilion put up to sleep and eat as she journeys with the hero.[316]

Even in the *Morte Darthur*, examples are not numerous. Morgan le Fay rests in a pavilion after a day's journey as she rides to see Alexander the Orphan, and King Mark has his pavilions pitched while he oversees the work on a tomb to commemorate Launceor and his lady.[317] Otherwise, it is only King Arthur who can be clearly seen to use tents as he and his retinue move around the country. Arthur is the figure most commonly associated with tents and pavilions in many Arthurian romances, including

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night in a meadow since giants have wasted the land to such an extent that no dwelling survives within a day's ride.

[315] See *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory* (hereafter, *Malory*), ed. by Eugène Vinaver, 3rd edn, rev. by P.J.C. Field, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), I, 403-4.

[316] See *Sir Tristrem*, in *'Lancelot of the Laik' and 'Sir Tristrem'*, ed. by Alan Lupack (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1994), ll. 3077-8 and 3125-39 and *Ipomadon*, ed. by Rhiannon Purdie, EETS 316 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), ll. 6677 and 6831.

[317] *Malory*, II, 639 and I, 71.

the works of Malory and Chrétien de Troyes. First and foremost, this is for practical reasons as Arthur travels around his kingdom a great deal, generally accompanied by a sizeable number of followers. By travelling in a self-sufficient manner with their tented accommodation, Arthur and his court are not restricted to lodging in towns or large castles. Chrétien's *Conte du Graal* demonstrates this freedom of movement when Arthur decides to go in search of Perceval and swears not to stay in any one place for two consecutive nights until Perceval is found:

> Qui lors veïst dras enmaler,
> Et covertors et oreilliers,
> Coffres emplir, trosser somiers
> Et chargier charretes et chars,
> Qu'en n'i maine mie a eschars
> Tentes et paveillons et trez.
> .I. clers sages et bien letrez
> Ne pcüst escrire en .i. jor
> Tot le harnas et tot l'ator
> Qui fu apareilliez tantost.[318]

[Then you might have seen sheets, bedspreads and pillows packed into chests, coffers filled, packhorses loaded and carts and wagons laden, for they are not sparing in taking with them tents, pavilions and awnings. A learned, well-lettered clerk could not write a list in a whole day of all the harness and other equipment that was immediately made ready.]

It is evident here that Arthur does not travel alone and, however impetuously he decides to journey somewhere, his court, along with all his regal paraphernalia, must follow.

The Awntyrs of Arthure paints a good picture of the Arthurian fellowship as they move around the kingdom, and the level of comfort they enjoy. Arthur and his followers dine together while living in such temporary accommodation, just as they would in a hall and in no less splendid surroundings. When Sir Galeron arrives, Gawain courteously shows him into one of the pavilions:

> Pi3t was it prodly with purpour and palle,
> With beddus brauderit o brode and bankers bry3t;
> Inwith was a chapell, a chambour, a halle,
> A chymné with charcole to chaufe þe kni3t.[319]

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[318] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Roman de Perceval ou le conte du Graal*, ed. by Keith Busby (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993), ll. 4144-53.

[319] *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn*, ed. by Ralph Hanna (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974), ll. 443-6.

These lines could easily refer to a richly furnished castle rather than a tent but, although the account is rather fanciful, it is not in fact so far distant from the effect that many of the medieval elite were attempting to create with their tents and pavilions. In real life, too, tents would be employed by a travelling royal court, to ensure that there was a suitable level of accommodation for the entourage wherever they chose to spend time. In both the medieval East and West, tents that presented the illusion of being like a castle or palace were very popular with rulers, and particularly elaborate creations were set up for special occasions.

For example, detailed accounts survive (by three different people) of the assembly of Chaghatai tribes convened in 1404 by Timur in Samarquand to celebrate the marriage of six of his grandsons. The private tents of the royal family were placed in enclosures which 'had crenellations on top, were decorated as if made of tilework, had windows and gateways with towers, and were made of silk'.[320] Upon this occasion in Samarquand, there were also two large pavilions for banquets and a smaller, matching set of guyed tents, 'linked to one another by a series of corridors, showing that the whole ensemble was conceived as a palace complex'.[321] An account also survives of a garden created in 1302 for Ghazan Khan at Ujan (near Tabriz). Rashid al-Din described how the garden was

> ... provided with pavilions, towers, and a bath, while its center was occupied by a golden trellis tent adjoining a tent of state with awnings. The tent, together with a golden throne inlaid with rubies and other jewels, was three years in the making and took one month to erect.[322]

The tent is used in this instance for a function normally catered for by a palace, and the overlap between tent and palatial structures is apparent. On this subject, Drew asserts:

> The royal Ottoman tents are characterised by their magnificence and by the blurring of the distinction between architecture and tents. Architectural elements were frequently incorporated in tents conceived as temporary palaces.[323]

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[320] Bernard O'Kane, 'From Tents to Pavilions: Royal Mobility and Persian Palace Design', *Ars Orientalis*, 23 (1993), 249-68 (p. 250).
[321] O'Kane, 'From Tents to Pavilions', p. 251.
[322] O'Kane, 'From Tents to Pavilions', p. 250.
[323] Drew, *Tensile Architecture*, p. 105.

Although such combining of tents with architectural features was most characteristic of nomadic peoples, the decorative effect is comparable with what European royalty was trying to achieve with its tents in the same period, also by imposing grand architectural designs on tents. In 1393, Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, used a tent at the village of Lelinghen (on the borders of Ponthieu and Boulogne) that was 'made of planks of wood, and covered by painted canvas: its form was that of a castle flanked by towers'.[324]

In medieval literature, as we will see, it was taken for granted that tents and pavilions could provide a form of highly luxurious accommodation, and act as status symbols, conferring prestige upon the owner and making the tent a suitable gift to be exchanged by rulers.[325] Even though tents developed into a luxury item, they retained their inherent practical qualities and served to give a king and his fellowship greater flexibility, so that they could be suitably accommodated wherever they might be, as soon as he gave the order to pitch camp. The advantages can be seen in the *Morte Darthur* when, for example, Arthur feels ill one day and therefore has his pavilion set up in a meadow so that he can lie down inside. On this occasion, halting in this particular place happens to initiate a new adventure for one of Arthur's knights. Arthur attempts to detain a knight who is passing by his pavilion and when the man refuses to stop, he orders Balyn to fetch him back. The unfortunate knight, however, is struck dead by an invisible agent once he has been brought back to Arthur's pavilion, thus creating a quest for Balyn, to avenge the death.[326] Arthur's decision to pitch his pavilion on this site thereby causes a whole chain of events whose starting point is marked by the tent.

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[324] Godfrey Rhodes, *Tents and Tent-Life, from the Earliest Ages to the Present Time* (London: Smith, Elder, 1858), p. 153.

[325] For an example of a Seljuk pavilion given as a gift to Louis IX by the king of Armenian Cilicia, see Scott Redford, *Landscape and the State in Medieval Anatolia: Seljuk Gardens and Pavilions of Alanya, Turkey*, BAR International Series 893 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2000), p. 68. Drew notes that by the mid-thirteenth century, kings of France and Hungary were sending fine linen tents as gifts to Mongol princes; see *Tensile Architecture*, p. 109.

[326] *Malory*, I, 79-81. In Malory's source, the *Suite du Merlin* (part of the thirteenth-century Post-Vulgate Cycle), Arthur stops not in fact because he is ill but merely tired. See *Lancelot-Grail. The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, ed. and trans. by Norris J. Lacy and others, 5 vols (London: Garland, 1993-6), IV, 202-3.

Usually the place where Arthur pitches his tent does not carry particular significance or mark a new phase in the plot, although there are occasional exceptions as in the example above. In Malory's 'The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney' too, Arthur intentionally uses the pitching of camp as a symbolic gesture, when he orders his company to camp on the spot where they have at last caught up with Gareth and Gawain:

> the kynge commaunded that all maner of knyghtes that were undir his obeysaunce sholde make their lodgynge ryght there, for the love of his two nevewys. And so hit was done ... .[327]

Arthur has his encampment set up, on a whim, to honour his nephews and to express through that act his great joy at seeing them again. He thereby effectively captures the moment by recording it (at least temporarily) in the landscape, in the form of his camp.

The portable nature of the tent confers power upon Arthur because, at any given point that he selects, he can have his pavilions set up and thereby transform that space into *his* space. Other knights do not always co-operate, however, with their liege lord's desire for mastery of the landscape. In Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*, the eponymous hero (despite being in need of treatment for his injuries) is determined not to deviate from his intended route to lodge with Arthur, who is camped nearby for a hunting party. After Kay has failed to compel Erec to change his mind by force, Gawain is sent and comes up with a more gallant solution:

> Gauvains estoit de molt grant san.
> Arrieres se tret et consoille
> a un des vaslez an l'oroille
> que tost aille dire le roi
> que il preigne prochain conroi
> de ses trez destendre et abatre,
> et veigne trois liues ou catre
> devant ax en mi le chemin
> tandre les aucubes de lin.
> 'Iluec l'estuet enuit logier,
> s'il vialt conoistre et herbergier
> le meillor chevalier por voir
> c'onques veïst, au mien espoir,
> qu'il ne vialt por un ne por el
> guerpir sa veie por ostel.'[328]

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[327] *Malory*, I, 358. Malory's source for this book is unknown.
[328] *Erec et Enide*, ll. 4066-80.

> [Gawain was a man of great sense. He draws back and whispers in the ear of one of the pages that he must go quickly to tell the king that he should at once take steps to strike and dismantle his tents, then come three or four leagues ahead of them and erect the linen pavilions in the middle of the road. He should spend the night there, if he wishes to get to know and entertain truly the best knight he might ever expect to see, but who, for one reason or another, is unwilling to go out of his way to take lodging.]

Arthur immediately follows Gawain's advice and has the tents moved, while Gawain delays Erec with conversation. Erec realises he has been tricked as he continues his journey and then sees the royal pavilions ahead of him, but understands the chivalric intention behind the ruse which was employed only so that Arthur and his court could honour him.

Arthur is successful, in this instance, thanks to Gawain's clever exploitation of the mobility of the royal camp. In *Yvain*, though, we see that it is not only the king who can use his pavilions to gain territorial advantage; Arthur does not stand in an all-powerful relationship to his knights. Other knights too can annex their own pieces of space by setting up a series of pavilions and tents, thereby forming a temporary 'court' to rival that of the king. Such is the case when Yvain and Gawain decide to camp outside a town where Arthur is holding court:

> ce dit li contes, ce me sanble;
> et li dui chevalier ansanble
> ne vostrent en vile descendre,
> einz firent lor paveillon tendre
> fors de la vile et cort i tindrent
> c'onques a cort de roi ne vindrent,
> einçois vint li rois a la lor,
> car avoec ax sont li meillor
> des chevaliers, et toz li plus.[329]

> [and the story as I know it says that the two companions were unwilling to lodge together in the town, but had their tents erected outside it and held court there, not once coming to the king's court, but the king coming to theirs; for the majority, and the best, of the knights were with them.]

The pair of knights increase their honour by having their own personal residence, in which they can play host to other worthy knights as well as to the king himself.

So far there seem to be very few women who travel with pavilions in their own right, rather than as part of a king's retinue. There is one important exception, however,

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[329] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier au lion (Yvain)*, ed. by Mario Roques, CFMA 89 (Paris: Champion, 1965), ll. 2687-95.

in the form of the fairy mistresses of romance, who are often associated with pavilions. Their lodgings frequently add to their enigmatic characters, since a tent gives no clues about the owner's origins, and they usually cannot be seen to travel with their pavilions but simply appear, perhaps by magic, at a point in the romance landscape. The hero of Marie de France's *Lanval*, for instance, first meets his future lover when led by her maidens into her extraordinarily rich tent:

> Treskë al tref l'unt amené,
> Que mut fu beaus e bien asis.
> La reïne Semiramis,
> Quant ele ot unkes plus aveir
> E plus pussaunce e plus saveir,
> Ne l'emperere Octovïen
> N'esligasent le destre pan.
> Un aigle d'or ot desus mis;
> De cel ne sai dire le pris,
> Ne des cordes ne des peissuns
> Que del tref tienent les giruns;
> Suz ciel n'ad rei ki[s] esligast
> Pur nul aver k'il i donast.[330]
>
> [They led him to the tent, which was so beautiful and well-appointed that neither Queen Semiramis at the height of her wealth, power and knowledge, nor the Emperor Octavian, could have afforded even the right-hand side of it. There was a golden eagle placed on the top, the value of which I cannot tell, nor of the ropes or the poles which supported the walls of the tent. There is no king under the sun who could afford it, however much he might give.]

The lavish description strongly suggests that this is a supernatural pavilion, since every detail of it is far in excess of anything that an earthly ruler might own. Likewise, in Thomas Chestre's *Sir Launfal*, a Middle English version of the same story, there is a similar implication that the pavilion is too wonderful to be anything other than a work of faery:

> Þe pauyloun was wrouth, forsoþe, ywys,
> All of werk of Sarsynys,
> Þe pomelles of crystall;
> Vpon þe toppe an ern þer stod,
> Of bournede gold, ryche & good,
> Jfloryshed wyth ryche amall;
> Hys eyn wer carbonkeles bryȝt –
> As þe mone þe schon anyȝt,
> Þat spreteþ out ouyr all.
> Alysaundre þe conquerour,

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[330] *Lanval* in Marie de France, *Lais*, ed. by Alfred Ewert and Glyn S. Burgess (London: Bristol Classical, 1995), ll. 80-92. Translations are taken from *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. by Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999).

Ne knyg Artour yn hys most honour,
Ne hadde noon scwych juell.[331]

Although Chestre attributes the pavilion's workmanship to Saracens, the tent is still far superior to anything that any of history's greatest leaders might have possessed.

Les Mervelles de Rigomer (a romance of the late twelfth or early thirteenth century) provides several further examples of fairies who appear in tents at various points in the narrative. Gawain is rescued from Wanglent castle by the magical intervention of fairies and then taken to their pavilion.[332] Later on, he meets his fairy mistress, Lorie, who is awaiting him outside Rigomer in her spectacular pavilion. The narrator describes it at some length and concludes that it was even more wonderful, rich and beautiful than the castle of Rigomer itself.[333] In the thirteenth-century Occitan romance *Jaufre*, the magical Fada de Gibel actually gives her pavilion to the hero; it is a valuable gift which can cover more than half a league of ground and has several marvellous properties.[334]

It is already apparent that the tent (or the space that a tent circumscribes) possesses two important qualities: mobility and independence. Those who use tents can swiftly and easily set up a high standard of living quarters in the location of their choosing and yet retain some degree of independence from the surrounding landscape. We will see as this chapter progresses that this is true for individuals, such as Tristram, Yvain and the fairy mistress, and also on a larger scale, for military encampments. When an army invades another land and sets up its camp, it thereby makes claim to that space and, in a siege situation, issues a challenge to rights over the city or castle.

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[331] Thomas Chestre, *Sir Launfal*, ed. by A.J. Bliss (London and Edinburgh: Nelson, 1960), ll. 265-76.
[332] *Les Mervelles de Rigomer von Jehan*, ed. by Wendelin Foerster (Dresden: Niemeyer, 1908), ll. 11,947-12,004.
[333] *Rigomer*, ll. 12,753-842.
[334] See *Jaufré: roman Arthurien du XIII^e siècle en vers provençaux*, ed. by Clovis Brunel (Paris: Picard, 1943), ll. 10,509-49. For a further example of a pavilion built by fairies, see *Li Romans de Claris et Laris*, ed. by Johann Altone (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1966), ll. 29,172-355.

Martial Tents

It is in a military context that the tent most frequently occurs in medieval literature. In the wars depicted in medieval romances, tents are indispensable. Rulers, both Christian and heathen, enter into campaigns well-provisioned with tents and pavilions which provide overnight accommodation while travelling and become longer-term settlements when a camp is pitched to besiege a city. When armies are depicted on the move, the men are always accommodated in large camps with the leader amongst them in his pavilion. Malory is typical of romance authors when he describes Arthur setting out for war against the Roman emperor:

> Than in all haste that myght be they shypped their horsis and harneyse and all maner of ordynaunce that fallyth for the werre, and tentys and pavylyons many were trussed ... .[335]

Tents and pavilions are included as standard items in the list of basic campaign equipment.

When the Arthurian knights later encounter their enemy, the Romans are awaiting them in a vast encampment:

> they sawe before hem many prowde pavylyons of sylke of dyverse coloures that were sette in a medow besyde a ryvere, and the Emperoures pavylyon was in the myddys with an egle displayed on loffte.[336]

Leaders are closely associated with their armies, and are usually placed in a pavilion at the heart of the camp. Frequently, as with the Roman emperor, the leader's pavilion is clearly distinguished from the others. The most widespread way of achieving this distinction was to ornament the cap and ball at the peak in a pavilion's roof. Such adornment could easily be seen from a distance, making the chief tent instantly recognisable. Eagles were the most popular emblems and a sign of high status. The

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[335] *Malory*, I, 195-6.

[336] *Malory*, I, 206. Malory's source for this section of the *Morte Darthur*, 'The Tale of Arthur and the Emperor Lucius', is the fourteenth-century *Alliterative Morte Arthure* (although the one manuscript that survives is not the version used by Malory). Malory's description of the Roman camp is somewhat shorter than that in the surviving manuscript of the *Alliterative Morte*, which speaks a little more fully of the rich tents, calling them 'palaises' (l. 1287). See the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* in *King Arthur's Death: The Middle English 'Stanzaic Morte Arthur' and 'Alliterative Morte Arthure'*, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1986), ll. 1287-94.

eponymous Saracen in *Sir Ferumbras* instantly recognises Charlemagne's pavilion as it too is marked out in this way:

> By þe egle of gold þat bri3te schon vppon charlis pauyloun
> knew he þer-by þe kyng, was on þat was of gret renoun.[337]

The custom of displaying an eagle on top of a leader's pavilion was common amongst both Christian and Saracen hosts.[338] The splendid pavilions of individual knights or ladies of romance are also frequently enhanced in the same way. Thus the fairy mistress of Marie de France's *Lanval* boasts a golden eagle over her pavilion, which serves to reinforce the impression created of her great wealth and status.[339] Unusually, however, in *Ipomadon* the Middle English translator deviates from his Anglo-Norman source when describing King Meleager's tent and a model golden eagle upon it that cries out when the wind blows, substituting instead a bell:

> And a bell stode þeron off gold
> That was wysely made on mold.
> When wayttys shuld blow on nygtt,
> It wold ringe a long while,
> That men my3te it here more þen a myle
> To comfort kyng and knyght.
> In this belle a stone stoode,
> A charebokyll riche and good;
> Lyght as the mone it shone.[340]

Considering the frequency with which eagles are employed to adorn pavilions elsewhere in romance, Purdie finds it 'all the more curious then that the ME translator should have substituted a bell'.[341]

Aside from *Ipomadon*, there is surprisingly little variation upon the eagle theme when romance authors describe their fanciful pavilions. In the early thirteenth-century *Roman d'Yder*, however, three of the most high-ranking characters, Arthur, Guinevere and Queen Guenloie, each have a dragon upon their pavilions. The dragon evidently

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[337] *Sir Ferumbras, Part One*, ed. by Sidney J. Herrtage, EETS ES 34 (London: Trübner, 1879), ll. 78-9.
[338] For a further example, see the description of the Sultan's pavilion in *Guy of Warwick*, ed. by Julius Zupitza, EETS ES 42, 44, 49 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1883, 1887 and 1891), Caius MS, ll. 3879-80.
[339] See *Lanval*, ll. 87-8.
[340] *Ipomadon*, ll. 2889-97.
[341] *Ipomadon*, p. 285.

conveys a prestige similar to the eagle, as well as traditionally being Arthur's personal symbol. It serves as a means of identification, as shown when Talac tells Yder,

> Ne sai qui sont li pavillon
> Fors cel forein a cel dragon
> Qu'a la reine Genievre est.
> Jo ne sui pas bien cert de cest
> Kar li rois ad dragon el suen,
> Pur autre choce nel sai joen.
>
> [I don't know who the tents belong to except that one set apart with the dragon on it which is Queen Guinevere's. I'm not absolutely certain about that for the King has a dragon on his, that's the only reason I think it's hers.][342]

Later we see that Guenloie similarly has the dragon emblem upon her tent; as a niece of Arthur she too is entitled to use the royal symbol and thereby display her family connection to the king.[343]

When a Roman camp is imagined in *The Siege of Jerusalem*, the chieftain's tent also features golden dragons and lions as well as the conventional crowning golden eagle, alongside a particularly elaborate range of other embellishments:

> Þey sette sadly a sege þe cite alle aboute,
> Piȝten pauelouns doun of pallen webbes,
> With ropis of riche silk raysen vp swyþe
> Grete tentis as a toun of torke[ys] cloþys.
>
> [C]hoppyn ouer þe cheuentayns with charboklis foure
> A gay egle of gold on a gilde appul
> With grete dragouns [and] grym alle in gold wroȝte
> & [to] lyouns lyk + lyande þervndere.
>
> Paled & paynted þe paueloun was vmbe,
> Stoked ful of storijs + stayned myd armys
> Of quaynte colour[es] to know, kerneld alofte,
> An hundred stondyng + stage in þat stede one.
>
> Toured with torettes was þe tente þanne,
> Suþ britaged aboute briȝt to byholde.[344]

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[342] *The Romance of Yder*, ed. and trans. by Alison Adams (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983), ll. 1051-6.

[343] *The Romance of Yder*, ll. 4425-43. The hero of *Huon of Burdeux* also has a spectacular pavilion with a dragon on top; see *The Boke of Duke Huon of Burdeux*, ed. by S.L. Lee, EETS ES 40, 41, 43, 50 (London: Trübner, 1882-7), pp. 680-1.

[344] *The Siege of Jerusalem*, ed. by Ralph Hanna and David Lawton, EETS 320 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), ll. 325-38. Hanna and Lawton have difficulty glossing 'choppyn' (l. 329), but the line should be taken to mean 'They sculpted on top of the chieftain's [i.e. tent] a gay eagle of gold with four carbuncles ...'.

The most important pavilion here is especially eye-catching, fancifully adorned with numerous devices and ornate images from historical stories. In addition, this tent is architecturally complex, since its splendour is further enhanced by battlements and small towers. Although the Romans' ostensible purpose is to capture the city of Jerusalem by force, a magnificent spectacle is created too that is rather superfluous to their military aims.

Such spectacle is naturally quite distant from the actual reality of the day for armies in transit. As Homan comments, 'Throughout history, tents' relatively low production costs and portability have ensured a long and integral relationship with the military'.[345] Literature paints a far more colourful picture of what is essentially a very practical form of portable accommodation. There is some evidence, though, that the tent was generally considered more comfortable than other kinds of temporary structure. Jean Froissart, for example, describes an incident in the Hundred Years War, in which

> li signeur de France, qui avoient perdu leurs tentes et leurs pourveances, orent conseil qu'il se logeroient d'arbres et de foellies plus priès de le ville, et qu'il se maintenroient plus sagement. Si se alèrent logier à grant painne ... .
>
> [the lords of France, having lost their tents and their provisions, decided that it would be wiser to make huts of branches and leaves, nearer the town. These they occupied in some discomfort ... .][346]

In the romances, leaders are most frequently shown at the heart of the camp, at one with their men, distinguished only by a superior kind of pavilion. That pavilion indeed often forms the focal point of the encampment around which the other men will rally. It is clear, however, that in reality many kings or high-ranking leaders would readily give up this sense of solidarity in exchange for a more comfortable overnight stay in a religious house. Froissart again provides several examples. In 1327, when Edward III made his first expedition against the Scots, he spent many nights under canvas as he passed through sparsely inhabited countryside, but chose to stay in a monastery just outside Durham 'et li hos contreval les prés' [with the army encamped in the surrounding

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[345] Michael M. Homan, *To Your Tents, O Israel! The Terminology, Function, Form, and Symbolism of Tents in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), p. 61.

[346] *Chroniques de J. Froissart*, ed. by Siméon Luce, Gaston Reynaud, Léon Mirot and others, 15 vols (Paris: Renouard, 1869-1975), II, 145-6. Translations are based on those by John Jolliffe in *Froissart's Chronicles* (London: Harvill, 1967).

country].[347] Later, on campaign in France, Edward spent his first two nights in the monastery at Mont Saint Martin, while his ally, the Duke of Brabant, lodged at the nearby monastery of Vaucelles.[348]

At the other end of the social scale, it is more difficult to say how all the rank and file soldiers were accommodated when on the move. Homan notes that 'the extent to which tents were distributed to the lower-ranking soldiers is unknown', although he speculates that 'it seems likely that most would sleep in a shelter of some sort'.[349] The writers of romance and chronicle share an almost equal lack of interest in the fate of the socially insignificant masses on this subject. Chrétien de Troyes is, therefore, highly unusual when, upon two occasions in his romances, he mentions (albeit briefly) the situation of the lower ranks of soldiers when camp is pitched. In *Erec et Enide*, Guivret pitches camp at a spot that provides little comfort for his men:

> Iluec sont remés et logié.
> Ne furent pas de logier quoi,
> mes petit troverent de quoi,
> car il n'i avoit pas po gent;
> par ces haies se vont loigent.
> Guivrez fist son pavellon tandre
> et comande une aesche esprandre
> por alumer et clarté feire ... .
>
> [There they stayed and made their quarters. They were not slow to prepare their camp, but found little they could use, for their numbers were by no means small. People go along the hedgerows finding places to sleep. Guivret has his tent erected and firewood kindled to burn up brightly ... .][350]

There is a marked distinction between the luxurious pavilion enjoyed by the leaders and the basic conditions that must be suffered by the majority of the army. Similarly, in the *Conte du Graal*, when Clamadeu besieges Beaurepaire Chrétien tells us that the ranks of men are clearly divided into those who possess tents and those without:

> Lors font tres et paveillons tendre
> Cil qui aportez les i orent,
> Et li autre, si comme il porent,
> Se logierent et atraverent ... .[351]

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[347] *Chroniques de Froissart*, I, 71-2.
[348] See the *Chroniques de Froissart*, I, 165.
[349] Homan, *To Your Tents*, p. 78.
[350] *Erec et Enide*, ll. 5074-81.
[351] *Le Conte du Graal*, ll. 2512-15.

> [Then those who have brought them have their tents and pavilions pitched, whilst others bivouacked and camped out as best they could ... .]

Chrétien's depictions of the realities of camping while on campaign extend only this far and, in common with other romance writers, he says little of the difficulties of camping in a harsh, unfamiliar environment.

The fictional leaders of romance generally have the good fortune to be able to select an ideal camping spot, as typified by Charlemagne in *Otuel and Roland*:

> In a mede that grene was
> Charles chese a fayre plas,
> To telden on hys pauylon.
> Seuene dayes he soiourned there,
> And ouer the water he dude rere
> A fayre brygge withoute assoyne,
>
> That the frenche men myȝten tho
> Ouer that brygge come and go,
> To fleen here enymyes.[352]

Charlemagne here successfully follows the advice offered to kings in the field by texts such as the late fifteenth-century *Þe Priuyté of Priuyteis*, a Middle English version of the *Secreta Secretorum*: 'And pycche neuir þi tentis but ner an hyl or ner a watyr, and euir be befforn of vitayle.'[353] History, however, records that great hardship often ensued when troops had to camp out on campaign, such as that suffered by Edward III's troops in their pursuit of the Scots in 1327. According to Froissart, the English troops rode all day at full speed in a futile attempt to catch up with the wily Scots. By nightfall, the English had become separated from some of their companions, presumably including the camp followers who would have carried all the tents and other equipment for pitching camp. They therefore

> couvint là le nuit gesir sour celle rivière tous armés, cescuns son cheval en sa main par le frain, car il ne le savoit à quoi loiier ... . Ensi ne mengièrent toute le nuit li cheval, ne le jour devant, de avainne nulle ne de fourage. Et eulz meismes ne goustèrent, tout le jour ne le nuit, que

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[352] *'Firumbras' and 'Otuel and Roland'*, ed. by Mary Isabelle O'Sullivan, EETS 198 (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), ll. 692-700.

[353] *Secretum Secretorum: Nine English Versions*, ed. by M.A. Manzalaoui, EETS 276 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 196/19. Geoffrey of Monmouth furthermore illustrates another piece of common wisdom: that of positioning one's army actually upon a hill, while also demonstrating that such an advantage is not in itself sufficient for victory. He tells of one military encounter in which the Saxons are over-confident in the strength of their defensive hill-top position and ultimately succumb to the greater strength and determination of Arthur's forces. See *The 'Historia Regum Britanniae' of Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. by Acton Griscom (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1929), p. 439.

> cescun son pain qu'il avoit derrière lui tourset, ensi que dit vous ay, qui estoit de le sueur dou cheval tous soulliés et ordes ... . Ensi que vous oés, et à tel meschief, passèrent il le nuit, sans oster selles à leurs chevaus, ne yaus desarmer.[354]
>
> [had to spend the night on the river bank, fully armed and keeping hold of the reins of their horses, for there was nowhere to tie them up ... . The horses had no oats or forage that night, or the day before either, nor did the men have anything to eat except the loaf that each one carried, which was soaked by the sweat of the horses ... . They spent the night miserably, without either taking their armour off or unsaddling their horses.]

On the following day, matters only worsen as a result of persistent rain.

> ... la rivière sour la quèle il estoient logiet, devint si grande que nuls ne pooit envoiier pour veoir ne savoir là où il estoient cheu, ne où il poroient recouvrer de fourage ne de littière pour leurs chevaus, ne pain, ne vin, ne autre cose, pour yaus soustenir.[355]
>
> [the river on which they were encamped was in such spate that no one could be sent to find out where they were, or to get food and litter for the horses, or bread and wine for their own sustenance.]

When the English finally do locate their enemy, the Scots have naturally chosen a strong defensive position that leaves the English, attempting to besiege them, with yet another very poor camping ground.[356]

Such may have been the reality, but it was not a problem that the heroes of romance had to overcome. Certain other disadvantages of the tent form, however, were considered by the romance writers and fully exploited by them. The vulnerability of an encampment is frequently demonstrated in the literature of the period and there is a recurring element of trickery in such tales. Tents are, by their nature, easy to destroy and cut down. This weakness is illustrated in *Firumbras* when Saracens attack Floripas and set her tower on fire, only to learn the truth of the old adage that people who live in glass houses should not throw stones. Floripas turns the fire back towards the invaders and

> the pauylons and the tentys, they stoden on the grownde,
> al to-brent in colys, in frenche as hyt ys fownde.[357]

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[354] *Chroniques de Froissart*, I, 58.
[355] *Chroniques de Froissart*, I, 59.
[356] See the *Chroniques de Froissart*, I, 65.
[357] *Firumbras*, ll. 803-4.

The Saracens' assault quite literally backfires, and it is their tents that are found to be their Achilles heel.

When an army concentrates all its energy on attacking its opponents, it inevitably leaves itself open to counter-attack. In Chrétien's *Cligés*, the Saxons fight a combined force of Greeks and Germans, in response to the breaking of a marriage agreement between Fenice, daughter of the German emperor, and the Duke of Saxony. The Saxons attack their enemies as Fenice (now married to the Greek emperor) is being escorted to Greece, and a Saxon spy reports to the duke the opportunity that he has spotted for them to abduct Fenice:

> 'Dus,' fet l'espie, 'n'a remés
> An totes les tentes as Gres
> Home qui se puisse desfandre.
> Or puez feire la fille prandre
> L'empereor, se tu me croiz,
> Tant con les Grex antendre voiz
> A l'estor et a la bataille.' [358]
>
> ['Duke,' says the spy, 'in all the Greeks' tents there's no one left able to defend himself. Now, if you take my advice, you can have the emperor's daughter seized while you see the Greeks preoccupied with fighting in the battle.']

A small band of Saxons are therefore sent to the camp, unseen by the Greeks, and easily seize Fenice in her tent without the use of much force.

Access into a camp can be relatively easy for the outsider and this sets up opportunities for the use of trickery. In *Octovian* for example, Clement, disguised as a heathen, is able to approach the pavilion of the Sultan himself to ask for food.[359] He is then lent a horse and admired by all as he rides before the tents. The Sultan is so impressed that he allows Clement to borrow his own prize horse, upon which Clement promptly rides off. This humorous escapade highlights the ease with which Clement is able both to enter – and then swiftly make his exit from – the Sultan's camp. There is very little to hinder his progress in either direction, a fact that ensures the success of his scheme.

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[358] Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligés*, ed. by Stewart Gregory and Claude Luttrell (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993), ll. 3601-7.
[359] *Octovian*, ed. by Frances McSparran, EETS 289 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), ll. 1441-88.

A more serious threat is in evidence in *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, in the form of an attempted murder in a pavilion. Tents can, it seems, be very dangerous places to lower one's guard for even a moment, since they can be infiltrated so easily by an enemy. In this text, King Anguis vows to kill Uther in his pavilion. Uther, however, survives; warned by Merlin, he is not in his tent when Anguis comes stealthily to attack him, but out in the relative safety of the field instead.[360]

Guile and trickery can further increase the damage inflicted on an enemy who has only the scant protection offered by the canvas wall of his pavilion. Lydgate dramatically illustrates this in his *Fall of Princes*, in which the tyrannical king Cyrus deliberately lures his opponents into a series of large pavilions. He has furnished these pavilions expressly to create an environment that invites relaxation and enjoyment of the luxuries contained within, but is in reality a deadly trap. Cyrus defeats and kills the prince of Scythia and his men 'rather be wilis than manhood or prowesse':[361]

> First he [Cyrus] leet stuffe large pauillouns
> With gret plente off drynkis delectable,
> Duyers metis and confeccioun
> Round aboute vpon eueri table;
> And in his menyng passyng deceyuable,
> Lich as he hadde in maner dreedful be
> Took al his hoost & gan anon to fle.
>
> This younge prynce, off menyng innocent,
> Nothyng demyng as be supposaile,
> But that Cirus was with his meyne went
> And fledde for feer, he durste hym nat assaile.
> And whan he fond such plente off vittaile,
> He & his knyhtis thoruh mysgouernaunce,
> To ete & drynke set al ther plesaunce.[362]

The pavilions provide the perfect set-up for Cyrus's scheme: they replicate the luxury of a banqueting hall, supplied with sumptuous food and drink, but with none of the protection offered by the physical structure of a wooden or stone hall. The foolish Scythians nonetheless allow themselves to be lulled into a false sense of security in these surroundings. There are no walls to act as a safeguard for the prince and his men

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[360] *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, ed. O.D. Macrae-Gibson, EETS 268, 279, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1973 and 1979), I, 1995-2075.
[361] *Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, ed. by Henry Bergen, EETS ES 121-4 (London: Oxford University Press, 1924-7), I, 3815.
[362] *Fall of Princes*, I, 3816-29.

when, as Lydgate tells us, they gorge themselves until nightfall. With the surprise return of Cyrus and his forces, the Scythians are too drunk to defend themselves and pay for their complacency with their lives.

The moral of Lydgate's tale is one implicit in many romances that include scenes where the unwary occupants of tents and pavilions are taken by surprise and suffer great losses. In the *Roman d'Eneas*, the besieging army of Turnus put themselves similarly at risk through drunkenness, even though there is no trickery involved in this instance. The Trojan Nisus spots his opportunity:

> La fors an l'ost sont andormi,
> ivre sont tuit et estordi,
> tant ont beü, tuit sont tüé
> et li feu sont tuit alumé;
> qui or les voldroit domagier,
> molt i porroit ja esploitier,
> uns sols hom mil en ocirroit,
> ja nus ne s'an retorneroit.[363]
>
> [There outside, the enemy is asleep, all drunk and unconscious. They have drunk so much that they are dead drunk, and the fires are all lit. Anyone who would wish to harm them now could surely accomplish much there; a single man might kill a thousand of them; surely none would escape it.]

We are then told that Nisus leaves the castle with just one companion, Euryalus, and the pair manage to slaughter over three hundred sleeping men. In the corresponding section of *Eneas's* source, Virgil's *Aeneid*, the soldiers are in some form of camp but there is no mention of any tents; the drunk are mostly sprawled on the grass, asleep, when they come under attack from Nisus and Euryalus. The French author, by contrast, refers twice during the episode to tents, which supports the notion that by the medieval period tents were an integral, assumed part of any siege setting. A tent is first mentioned when Rannes is killed:

> Tant ont alé li compaignon
> que il vindrent al paveillon
> ou Rannes jut, qui molt ert sages.[364]

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[363] *Eneas*, ed. by Jacques Salverda de Grave (Halle: Niemeyer, 1891), ll. 4927-34. The translations are those of John A. Yunck in *Eneas. A Twelfth-Century French Romance* (London: Columbia University Press, 1974).

[364] *Eneas*, ll. 5053-5. In the *Aeneid*, Rhamnes is killed while sleeping on bedding or rugs, but not in a tent.

> [The companions went until they came to a tent where Rannes lay, a man who was very wise.]

Rannes is, in fact, a famous diviner, but even he has no inkling of the danger and his tent provides him with no protection at all. Tents are again mentioned, and shown to be very easy to enter and plunder, when Euryalus steals Mesapus's helmet from inside a tent where Mesapus and his men are sleeping (ll. 5075-7).

The heroic and daring sortie by besieged against besiegers is a popular motif in both romance and chronicle. The eponymous hero of *Huon of Burdeux* epitomises this in his daring sorties out of his beleaguered city against the German emperor's forces. Huon's first response to the arrival of the emperor's vast army is to issue out of Bordeaux as quickly as possible with his men,

> to thentent to surpryce his enemyes, for at that tyme themperour was set at dyner. Than Huon & his company all at ones dasht in amonge the tentes and pauylyons / and bet them downe to þe erthe, so that they that were within were sore abasshed, for they had thought that Huon durst neuer a yssued out of the cyte agaynst hym, and the great nombre that he was of. ... many a ryche tent and pauylyon was beten downe to þe erthe, and they within slayne and all to hewyn.[365]

As Bordeaux suffers a lengthy siege, Huon and his men make frequent sorties and, although they continue to inflict significant losses on the enemy, their numbers dwindle. Huon is finally forced to sue for peace, but by now the emperor is so infuriated that he refuses it at any price. The hero's typically defiant response is another sudden attack on the emperor's tents with all his remaining men. The emperor is again dining but, having learnt, we assume, from previous experience, this time he has set three hundred men to guard the tents while he eats. Unfortunately for him,

> Huon and his company came so quyckly that he was amonge them, or they perceyued any thynge, & he cryed 'Burdeux', & strake a knyghte with his spere clene through the body ... .[366]

The guards prove ineffectual as the Frenchmen once again run riot amongst the German tents:

> within a shorte space the thre .C. Almayns that were set to kepe þe tentes were all slayne / then Huon & his company entred in amonge þe tentes & pauylyons; they bete downe tentes, & suche as they met were slayne /

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[365] *Huon of Burdeux*, p. 319.
[366] *Huon of Burdeux*, p. 344.

> then þe almayns on all partes armed them / & themperour sowned his trompettes, & armed him / he was so sorowful & angry with þe trauel and domage he was put to by Huon / that he enraged & was nere out of his wyt / for nyght & day he coulde take no rest.[367]

The emperor's feelings of intense frustration provide a good illustration of the lack of security offered by an encampment of tents. Although the Germans may appear to have the upper hand, having surrounded Bordeaux with vast numbers of men, their position is not a comfortable one when they can suffer the dangers of a surprise attack at any moment. Even when so severely outnumbered, Huon can still have a devastating impact on his enemies because of the fundamentally exposed nature of their camp.

The literary motif of the attacking tent-dwellers who soon find themselves put to a disadvantage when their enemy turns against the camp seems to have been hugely popular from the time of Geoffrey of Monmouth to that of Malory. We see in the *Morte Darthur* the way in which Malory clearly highlights the vulnerability of both his heroes and their enemies when they occupy tents and pavilions. During the early days of Arthurian rule, while the young king is still trying to take absolute control of his realm, Arthur and his knights set upon the eleven kings who oppose them at midnight while those knights are encamped. Malory states that Arthur's 'trusty knyghtes sette uppon them so fersely that he made them overthrowe hir pavilons on hir hedis'.[368] A little later, however, the tables are turned as Arthur's own camp is attacked at midnight, during the War with the Five Kings:

> So kynge Arthure was unarmed and leyde hym to reste with his quene Gwenyvere.
> 'Sir,' seyde sir Kayyus, 'hit is nat beste we be unarmed.'
> 'We shall have no nede,' seyde sir Gawayne and sir Gryflet that lay in a lytyll pavylyon by the kynge.
> So with that they harde a grete noyse and many cryed 'Treson!'[369]

Eight knights of the Round Table are slain in their pavilions, having had little chance to defend themselves; thus the wisdom of Kay's words is confirmed upon this occasion.

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[367] *Huon of Burdeux*, p. 345.
[368] *Malory*, I, 27.
[369] *Malory*, I, 128. The naivety of Arthur and his knights here may be due to a misinterpretation by Malory of his source. In the *Suite du Merlin*, Arthur is attacked at dawn (rather than 'be nyght' as in Malory's version), just as he and his knights are about to arm themselves. Vinaver and Field claim that Malory may have misunderstood his source, in which Arthur says 'il seroit biens tans que nous presissons nos armes' [it is time that we took up arms], as meaning 'there will always be time for us to take up arms'. See the commentary to *Malory*, III, 1339.

Such raids and daring sorties are not confined to the world of romance, and similar incidents were not considered too far-fetched for inclusion as fact in chronicles such as Froissart's. Froissart reports that in 1327, while the English were attempting to blockade the Scottish camp, Sir James Douglas rode out at night with two hundred men and

> passa celle rivière bien loing de leur host, par quoi on ne s'en perchuist; si feri en l'ost des Englès moult vassaument en criant: 'Douglas! Douglas! vous y morrés tuit, signeur baron englès.' Et en tua il et se compagnie plus de trois cens, et feri des esporons jusques proprement devant le tente le roy ... et copa deus ou trois des cordes de le tente dou roy, puis s'en parti à tant. Bien puet estre qu'il pierdi aucuns de ses gens à se retraite, mais ce ne fu mies gramment, et retourna arrière devers ses compagnons en le montagne.[370]
>
> [crossed the river at some distance from the English army and, unobserved, boldly broke into the English camp, crying 'Douglas! Douglas! You will all die, you English barons!' And they killed more than three hundred men, and spurred on right up to the King's tent ... and as they left, they cut two or three of the guy-ropes of the King's tent. They lost a few of their number, but most of them got away back to the mountain.]

It seems remarkable that the king's tent itself came under threat from just a small party of the enemy; whether or not Froissart is exaggerating, he demonstrates how simple it can be to break through the ranks of an encamped army.

On another occasion, Froissart describes with relish how the Countess of Montfort, besieged at Hennebont, attacked the camp of Charles de Blois after realising that all his forces were otherwise engaged in an assault on the city. She rode out with a number of her men – in a manner reminiscent of Huon of Bordeaux –

> et se feri très vassaument en ces tentes et en ces logeis des signeurs de France, qui tantos furent toutes arses, tentes et toutes loges, qui n'estoient gardées fors de garçons et de varlès qui s'en fuirent ... .[371]
>
> [and galloped up to the tents and lodgings of the attackers, and cut them down and burned them with impunity, for they were guarded only by boys and servants who fled at their approach ... .]

Charles's army apparently learnt nothing from this experience as, only a few days later, their tents again came under surprise attack from a sortie led by Walter de Manny which resulted in a number of French deaths. Heroic exploits of this sort seem to be popular in

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[370] *Chroniques de Froissart*, I, 68-9.
[371] *Chroniques de Froissart*, II, 144.

both chronicle and romance, and historical narrative and literary fiction may well have each influenced the other in the telling of such feats.

Where literature far outdoes history, though, is in the splendour of some of its imagined tent-creations. One of the foremost and most spectacular examples of this appears in the *Roman d'Eneas* in the form of its remarkable tent castle, a striking addition to its Virgilian source. The author tells us how a truce is agreed and the Trojans set up camp outside the city of Laurente, which they have been attacking. Firstly a good defensive position is chosen, upon a hill which had once been the site of a castle and retains a moat, which can be easily repaired, and some fortifications. The 1500 tents they erect will be clearly visible from Laurente. The Trojans begin by setting up a tent-wall to encircle their entire camp, and they

> portendu ont tot lo fossé
> d'une tente c'ot Eneas,
> de diverses colors de dras,
> fet par listes et par meriaus,
> o bretesches et o creniaus;
> toz ert carrez ansi a tiere,
> come l'an fet une mestriere.
> De loing sanbloit ce fust chastiaus,
> et a mervoille par ert biaus:
> n'iert noiant fet por forterece,
> mes por biauté et por richece.[372]
>
> [lined the whole moat with a tent which belonged to Eneas, made of different colours of cloth sewed in bands and blocks, with parapets and crenelations. It was all squares set in rows, in the manner that a wall is built. From a distance it seemed as if it were a castle, and it was marvelously beautiful: it was not at all made for strength, but for beauty and richness.]

Eneas's own tent, which the narrator tells us was captured by the hero from a Greek, is then raised in the midst of the camp. It is very colourful and highly patterned, has a golden eagle on its peak and looks like a fortress because it is so large. In conclusion, the narrator asserts: 'Asez fu tost fez li chastiaus; / ne fu pas forz, mais molt fu biaus' [Thus was their castle very quickly built; it was not strong, but it was most beautiful].[373] All this has been accomplished in a single night, so that when day breaks the

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[372] *Eneas*, ll. 7294-7304.
[373] *Eneas*, ll. 7329-30.

Laurentians are amazed to see what they think is a real castle made of stone and mortar. The apparently miraculous Trojan building effort strikes fear into the Laurentian people and convinces many that they were very mistaken to wage war against the Trojans. Faral has suggested that the source of the tent-fortress lies in the Arab custom of surrounding a group of tents with a wall of fabric.[374] Drew notes that even as late as the fifteenth century, the Ottoman capital continued to be wherever the Sultan pitched his tent, and his 'quarters consisted of a series of day and night tents surrounded by a cloth screen'.[375]

In many ways, Eneas's tent-castle is a crossover of elements discussed above. It is set up as a military move and with thought to where it could best be located to ensure the security of the Trojans should they be counter-attacked. Its effect is undeniably spectacular, though, and its force is in its appearance rather than in any physical qualities such as strength. It is practical to some degree, but also gloriously impractical and unnecessarily elaborate. Since this is fiction, we are allowed to believe that it could convince the Laurentians that it was made of stone, yet in actual fact its presence is of little assistance to the Trojans. Although we are told of the Laurentians' initial reaction of fear towards the 'fortress', when fighting resumes the encampment is barely mentioned again and certainly does not contribute to the Trojans' eventual victory.[376]

Ultimately, the tent-fortress enhances Eneas's image rather than conferring a practical military advantage upon him. There is a comparable situation in *William of Palerne*, in which the Greek emperor makes a statement about his might and the size of his army through the grandeur of his massed pavilions when he camps outside Rome. Ostensibly, the emperor is welcomed to Rome in order to marry Melior with the full consent of her father, the Roman emperor, although contrary to Melior's own wishes.

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[374] See Faral, *Recherches sur les sources latines*, p. 89. Raymond J. Cormier disputes this, although he remains unable to offer an alternative source, in 'Sources for the Trojans' Tent-Fortress in the *Roman d'Eneas*', *Studi Mediolatini e Volgari*, 25 (1977), 85-92.

[375] Drew, *Tensile Architecture*, p. 104. Michael Gervers and Wayne A. Schlepp observe that these screens might function as wind-breaks for the tents and 'such wind screens are not infrequently depicted in Chinese paintings of Mongol encampments; particularly good examples appear in scrolls depicting Liu Shang's late eighth-century text cycle of the *Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute*': 'Felt and "Tent Carts" in *The Secret History of the Mongols*', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 7:1 (1997), 93-116 (p. 94).

[376] For further interpretation of the role of the tent-fortress, see Christopher Baswell, 'Eneas's Tent and the Fabric of Empire in the *Roman d'Eneas*', *Romance Languages Annual*, 2 (1990), 43-8.

The impression created by his sizeable encampment, however, underlines that he is not a man to be trifled with and there is an element of coercion lurking beneath the surface, an unspoken threat. His camp is an arresting sight:

> in a place þer were pi3t pavilounns and tentes,
> bi o side of þe cite, for swiþe moche pepul.
> For þei þat seie it forsoþe saiden þe truþe:
> þe place of þe pavilons and of þe price tentes
> semede as moche to si3t as þe cite of Rome.
> Þemperour & everi man were esed to ri3ttes,
> and haden wi3tly at wille what þei wolde 3erne.[377]

The grand scale of his pavilions and tents not only suggests affluence, and the comfort of the emperor's temporary accommodation, but also power: if Melior should not be freely given to the Greek emperor, he is quite capable of winning her by force.

The marvellous encampments of *William of Palerne* and the *Roman d'Eneas* do not fit neatly into the category of martial tents. Although at least partially military and practical, there is an overwhelming aspect of display in their grandeur. This takes the form of a statement about power and also, simultaneously, a fabulous spectacle that is created at least partially for its own, purely aesthetic, sake. These pavilions have a decorative or symbolic function rather than being straightforward tools of war, and they have therefore much in common with more specifically recreational pavilions, a category that will be discussed in more detail below. I will focus then on the ways in which such tents are designed primarily for display purposes and, consequently, how image supersedes function. Although this may appear to be a characteristic of fiction alone, in real life too contemporary rulers sought to create pavilions that were works of art, pavilions influenced by and imitating architecture, that harkened back to romantic aspirations.

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[377] *William of Palerne: An Alliterative Romance*, re-ed. by G.H.V. Bunt (Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis, 1985), ll. 1627-33.

Tents at Tournaments

Aside from military contexts such as sieges, tents most commonly occur in romance as an essential part of the backdrop to the frequent tournaments. In *Ipomadon*, the raising up of a remarkable camp for the tournament at Candres is evoked by firstly describing the richness of King Meleager's pavilion and then the other tents that spring up around it, impressive in their sheer number:

> The tent [Meleager's] was white as anny mylke,
> The bordures all of clene sylke,
> In þe world was bettur non.
> There Malengere abydythe stille
> Wyth wyne and ale at all þer wille
> And knyghttys as trewe as stone.
> On ilke a syde they reysud þan,
> For lordys and for gentilmen,
> Tenttys monye one.
>
> By þat was sett come oþer grett plente,
> Dyueresse lordys of ferre contreye ... .[378]

Typically, the hero will approach the place at which jousts are to be held and will see from a distance, spread before him, the colourful sight of the many pavilions already pitched by knights keen to participate in the sport. *Huon of Burdeux* provides the following, characteristic, example:

> then he [Huon] rode towardes þe cite of Mayence; so longe he rode that he had a syght of the cyte, & then he sawe aboute in the medow many tentes & ryche pauylyons, pyght vp with pomelles of fyne golde shynyng agaynst the sonne / Huon behelde them well, & so passed forth & entred in to the cite, where as he sawe euery strete full of knyghtes & squyers abydynge þe daye of turney ... .[379]

This scene is paralleled several times in Malory's work. While Gareth is travelling with the damsel Lyonet, he comes across a white tower hung with fifty shields:

> And undir that towre there was a fayre medow, and therein was many knyghtes and squyres to beholde scaffoldis and pavylons; for there, uppon the morne, sholde be a grete turnemente.[380]

Even the spiritual tournament – of sinners opposing good men – that Lancelot sees, and participates in, during his quest for the Grail has the same, familiar appearance:

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[378] *Ipomadon*, ll. 2898-2908.
[379] *Huon of Burdeux*, p. 285.
[380] *Malory*, I, 308.

> And as he [Lancelot] loked before hym he sye a fayre playne, and besyde that a fayre castell, and before the castell were many pavelons of sylke and of dyverse hew. And hym semed that he saw there fyve hondred knyghtes rydynge on horsebacke, and there was two partyes: they that were of the castell were all on black horsys and their trappoures black, and they that were withoute were all on whyght horsis and trappers. So there began a grete turnemente ... .[381]

Only the colours of the jousting knights are unusual and reveal the deeply significant nature of this tournament. For the rest, its background appears quite normal.

The tournament scenes of romance are always presented in a manner easily recognisable to a knight errant or the reader of the work. Certain elements are generally present. The jousts will be held in a meadow or on a plain, just outside a city or castle, and quite often the sun is shining. There are always numerous tents and pavilions, frequently beautiful, rich and colourful, and sometimes scaffolds will be mentioned to accommodate the spectators – especially ladies – and judges. At times, Malory appears to find description of a tournament scene unnecessary, presumably because it is such a commonplace. On one such occasion, at the castle of Harde Rooche (where the King of Scots and King of Ireland hold against Arthur and his knights), we are merely told that Tristram 'rested nat tylle he cam to the castell where he saw fyve hondred tentes',[382] before an account of the fighting ensues. The five hundred tents are sufficient to evoke the scale of the tournament, and tents in this quantity are synonymous only with tournaments or war. Similarly, when Tristram comes to the tournament at Lonezep (held for his sake), Malory simply says that Tristram and his companions 'rode untyll they were ware of the castel of Lonezep, and than were they ware of foure hondred tentes and pavelouns, and mervaylous grete ordynaunce.'[383] The specifics of this 'ordynaunce' are left to the reader's imagination. The tents and pavilions, however, are

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[381] *Malory*, II, 931. 'The Quest of the Holy Grail' is Malory's least original work and follows its source very closely. Vinaver and Field judge that 'Apart from minor omissions and minor alterations, it is to all intents and purposes a translation of the French *Queste del Saint Graal*, the fourth branch of the thirteenth-century Arthurian Prose Cycle'; see the commentary to *Malory*, III, 1534.

[382] *Malory*, II, 557. Here Malory further abbreviates the already brief description of his source, the French *Prose Tristan*. He leaves out its comments on the beauty and size of the tournament ground, and mentions only five hundred tents while the French text speaks of 'paveillons', 'tres' and 'loges galesches' (shelters made from branches and foliage) which provide comfortable and very beautiful lodgings. See *Le Roman de Tristan en prose*, ed. by Philippe Ménard and others, 9 vols (Geneva: Droz, 1987-97), III, 223.

[383] *Malory*, II, 698.

once again noted, as the one really essential visual element common to every tournament.

Despite the regular and prominent appearance of tents and pavilions at tournaments, surprisingly few of the named knights in the *Morte Darthur* are actually ever shown as staying in tents. As I noted above, Tristram is the one significant exception to this trend, since he repeatedly inhabits pavilions while taking part in jousting. At the Castle of Maidens tournament, for example, 'kyng Arthure blew to lodgyng. Than sir Trystram departed to hys pavylion, and sir Dynadan rode with hym, and sir Persides.'[384] During this contest, Gaherys and Sagramoure le Desirous are also recorded as residing in tents. Again, at the Lonezep tournament, Tristram pitches his two pavilions near to the tourney ground. This time, the motivation is not merely to provide a temporary home for Tristram and his male companions convenient for the fighting, but also to set up a private space from which Isode can secretly watch the tournament: 'sir Trystram devysed to sende his two pavelons to set hem faste by the well of Lonezep, "and therein shall be the quene La Beall Isode"'.[385] Tristram's pavilions form a base for him and his companion knights, Palomydes, Dynadan and Gareth. When Gareth is knocked from his horse and slightly injured, Tristram and Palomydes help him back to the pavilions where he can remove his arms and have space in which to recuperate. Isode has an excellent vantage point from which she is able to observe the tournament in all its detail, including the treacherous switching of arms by the jealous Sir Palomydes. When Tristram in his turn wishes to disguise himself by changing his arms, it is to the pavilions that he returns and thus he is able to fool even his close friends. The pavilions occupy a space that is part of the tournament, contributing to the typical backdrop alongside the many other knightly tents, and close enough for all the action to be visible from them. They also, however, offer a space to which a knight can withdraw, temporarily out of reach and sight of the field.

At Lonezep, in particular, the impression is given that Tristram's pavilions shelter a temporary, independent community and act as a kind of substitute household.

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[384] *Malory*, II, 524.
[385] *Malory*, II, 722.

At the end of the day, Tristram and his friends disarm, wash and eat in the pavilions. The same rules of courtesy apply to the pavilion as to a lord's hall, a fact demonstrated when these rules are apparently breached by a visiting Arthur and Lancelot:

> And therewythall two knyghtes armed come unto the pavelon, and there they alyght bothe and cam in armed at all pecis.
>
> 'Fayre knyghtes,' seyde sir Trystram, 'ye ar to blame to com thus armed at all pecis uppon me whyle we ar at oure mete. And yf ye wolde onythynge wyth us, whan we were in the fylde, there myght ye have eased youre hertys.'[386]

When the identity of the two stranger knights is revealed, the men unarm and are warmly welcomed, demonstrating that no discourtesy was intended by their arrival fully armed in Tristram's lodging.

Tristram's use of pavilions underlines his independence from the court. While other prominent knights in the *Morte Darthur*, such as Lancelot and Gawain, generally stay close to Arthur at such tournaments, due to ties of fealty or blood, Tristram remains something of an outsider. Despite his acceptance into the Round Table fellowship and his particularly close bonds of friendship with Lancelot, Tristram never breaks away completely from his Cornish roots. These roots distance him, and this is reflected in the slight physical distancing that is a result of Tristram usually staying in his own pavilion.[387] At Lonezep there is also Isode to consider, since the tents shelter her too. Tristram and Isode's relationship as lovers is approved of by Lancelot, Guinevere and others at Arthur's court, and yet it cannot be brought out entirely into the open as long as Isode remains the wife of King Mark. The use of pavilions gives the couple a private space in which to continue their relationship and grants them some degree of freedom from strict social rules.

A similar desire for distance is evinced by Partonope when he attends the climactic three-day tournament in *Partonope of Blois*. When he arrives outside the site of the tourney, Chef d'Oire, Partonope opts to stay with his new-found companion, Gaudin le Blois. Somewhat confusingly, Gaudin initially offers Partonope hospitality in

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[386] *Malory*, II, 756.

[387] For an interesting, related argument (based on Gottfried's version of the legend) that Tristan's constant returns to the sea reflect his lack of a sense of fixed belonging and his 'spatial and emotional dislocation', see Molly C. Robinson, 'Tristan: A Story of Precarious Belonging', *Tristania*, 18 (1998), 1-15 (p. 1).

his 'pore house here faste by'.[388] Partonope accepts, but we are then told just a few lines later that

> They wolde not herborowe in house ne towne.
> Her men pyght vp a pavylone
> Enbrowded with golde boþe fresshe and gay,
> Right faste be the felde þer as the turney
> Shuld be holde, with-outen faile.[389]

The choice of accommodation reiterates Partonope's recently acquired independence. He is no longer dependent on either his beloved Melior or her sister, Urake, but has made his own way in the world for the first time, choosing his own, male, companion-in-arms and reaching the point at which he will be able to demonstrate his natural prowess on the public stage of the tournament. Electing to camp also significantly distances Partonope from the city of Chef d'Oire. Although the city embodies his desire – a desire for its female ruler, Melior, and additionally for governance over the city itself (and the esteem that would bring) – it is important that Partonope should, this time, earn his entry to the city and admittance to Melior's presence. This is vital for the adjustment of their relationship into a more male-dominated schema, rather than Melior being totally in control of her lover, as at the beginning of the romance. The pavilion furthermore allows Partonope to stay close to the site of the tournament, and provides him with suitably luxurious housing, yet at the same time is helpful in keeping his identity hidden until he has proven his worth by dint of his sword.

In reality, however, few people seem to have opted to camp when attending a tournament. Tents could provide temporary housing for participants, but alternative forms of accommodation were more popular. René of Anjou, in his mid-fifteenth-century *Traicté de la forme et devis d'ung tournoi*, does not recommend tents but

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[388] *The Middle English Versions of Partonope of Blois*, ed. by A. Trampe Bödtker, EETS ES 109 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1912; repr. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), l. 9474. The confusion arises from the Middle English translator's slight misinterpretation of his source, in which Gaudin invites Partonopeus to stay with him in his 'hostel' (which has a more general meaning of 'lodging' as well as denoting a house). *Partonopeus's* narrator then goes on to clarify that this 'hostel' was not 'en maison' but 'en un bel pavellon', lines which are also translated by the English author fairly closely at ll. 9494-8. See *'Partonopeus de Blois': An Online Edition*, ed. by Penny Eley and others (Sheffield: HriOnline, 2005), <www.hrionline.ac.uk/partonopeus>, A Meta 6736-55.

[389] *Partonope of Blois*, ll. 9494-8.

advocates lodging 'in a place of religion when arranging jousts, because the cloisters were the most convenient place to display the participants' arms prior to the combats'.[390] Inns were another option, and there is evidence of ordinances from German cities designed to prevent exploitation by regulating inn prices during tournaments.[391]

Occasionally a tent was put in place for spectators, as in Navarre in 1387 when jousts were held to honour the arrival of the queen and 'a locksmith was paid for erecting a pavilion from which the king and queen watched the jousts in the citadel at Pamplona'.[392] Even if not used so much for overnight accommodation, tents were still an integral part of real tournaments and jousts, frequently mentioned in accounts and images of such entertainments. Indeed, one fifteenth-century chivalric treatise, when instructing the reader as to 'How a man schall be armyd at his ese when he schal fighte on foote', states that a 'tente muste be pight in the felde'.[393] Such tents would be designed for arming a knight, repairing any damage to his equipment and as places in which the jousters could take refreshment at the conclusion of fighting.

In fact and fiction, tents were often erected at either end, or at diagonal corners, of the lists. Malory illustrates this in his description of the legal joust to be undertaken by Sir Bors (until Lancelot comes to relieve him of the duty) against Sir Mador, in defence of Queen Guinevere who stands accused of poisoning Mador's cousin Sir Patryse. Once each knight has sworn his oath before the king, 'Than ayther departed to their tentis and made hem redy to horsebacke as they thought beste'.[394] On a separate

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[390] Richard Barber and Juliet Barker, *Tournaments: Jousts, Chivalry and Pageants in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1989), p. 143.

[391] See Barber and Barker, *Tournaments*, p. 184. On the subject of inns in medieval Europe, see Norbert Ohler, *The Medieval Traveller*, trans. by Caroline Hillier (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1989), pp. 89-96.

[392] Barber and Barker, *Tournaments*, p. 97.

[393] See Harold Arthur, 'On a MS Collection of Ordinances of Chivalry of the Fifteenth Century, Belonging to Lord Hastings', *Archaeologia*, 57 (1900), 29-70 (pp. 46-7).

[394] *Malory*, II, 1056. In this episode, Malory makes significant changes – including the addition of the tents – to his sources, *La Mort le Roi Artu* and the fourteenth-century Middle English *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* (itself a condensation of *La Mort*). Malory increases the drama by having Lancelot arrive at the last possible moment after Bors has entered the field and very publicly made himself ready by arming in the tent provided. In *La Mort le Roi Artu*, by contrast, Lancelot arrives before Bors is even called upon to arm himself while in the *Stanzaic Morte*, Bors arms in his chamber (l. 1538) but Lancelot arrives before the combatants have time to move from the hall to the field of combat. See *La Mort le Roi Artu* in *Lancelot-Grail*, IV, 117; and the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* in *King Arthur's Death*, ed. by Benson, ll. 1512-80.

occasion, Tristram wishes to fight at a tournament organised by the giant, Sir Nabon le Noyre. Since Tristram has come to this land because of a shipwreck he has no arms, and is therefore obliged to ask Nabon to lend him both a horse and armour. Nabon responds by instructing Tristram, 'go thou to yondir pavylyon and arme the of the beste thou fyndyst there, and I shall play sone a mervayles pley wyth the'.[395] Such pavilions are a small but necessary part of the tournament or joust setting.

Pavilions Set up by a Knight to Signify his Desire to Joust

The third category of tents to be discussed belongs to a tradition most commonly found in Middle English in the *Morte Darthur*. Malory's landscape is punctuated by knights who have set up their pavilions specifically to invite or demand passing knights to fight with them. At times, the location of such pavilions and their knight-occupants appears to be completely random, as when Lancelot, after suffering two years of madness, by chance comes across Sir Blyaunte's pavilion:

> And thus as sir Launcelott wandred here and there, he cam into a fayre medow where he founde a pavelon. And thereby uppon a tre hynge a whyght shylde, and two swerdys hynge thereby, and two spearys lened thereby to a tre. And whan sir Launcelot saw the swerdys, anone he lepte to the tone swerde, and clyched that swerde in hys honde and drew hitte oute. And than he laysshed at the shylde, that all the medow range of the dyntys, that he gaff such a noyse as ten knyghtes hadde fought togydyrs.[396]

Blyaunte's pavilion is placed in a meadow, an open space which provides two knights with plenty of room to fight. Even while acting as a wild man, Lancelot reacts instinctively to the chivalric symbol of the pavilion with shield and weapons hung outside that invites a knightly challenge. He fights with Blyaunte and emphatically overcomes him, but his state of distraction is still much in evidence in his actions following this victory:

> And than sir Launcelot ran into the pavelon, and russhed evyn into the warme bedde. And there was a lady that lay in that bedde; and anone she gate her smokke, and ran oute of the pavylon, and whan she sawe her lorde lye at the grounde lyke to be dede, than she cryed and wepte as she had bene madde.[397]

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[395] *Malory*, I, 445.
[396] *Malory*, II, 817-18. The episode is based fairly closely on its source, the *Prose Lancelot*.
[397] *Malory*, II, 818.

The exhausted Lancelot is subsequently carried, while still unconscious, in this bed from Blyaunte's pavilion to his castle. It is interesting that the bed in question is a feather bed, indicating the luxury that would have been enjoyed by Sir Blyaunte and his lover while they sojourned in the pavilion.

Sir Blyaunte is slightly unusual in that he has chosen to pitch his tent simply in a fair meadow. More typically, knights who wish to issue a jousting challenge to their peers establish a pavilion by a ford or bridge, the passage across which they will then defend. Lancelot has earlier encountered a trio of knights, all brothers, who have positioned themselves in such a situation:

> ... he com unto a low contrey full of fayre ryvers and fayre meedys; and before hym he sawe a longe brydge, and three pavylyons stood thereon, of sylke and sendell of dyverse hew. And withoute the pavylyons hynge three whyght shyldys on trouncheouns of sperys, and grete longe sperys stood upryght by the pavylyons, and at every pavylyon dore stoode three freysh knyghtes.[398]

These knights, however, do not force their challenge upon all passers by, but appear instead to wait for knights to volunteer to face them. Shields are displayed in the conventional way, so that they may be struck by a potential opponent who wishes to indicate his desire for a joust. Lancelot is allowed to ride past unhindered until one of the three brothers recognises Kay's arms (which Lancelot is currently wearing in place of his own). Having mistaken Lancelot's identity, the knight pursues and rides against Lancelot only because he seeks to test his strength against Kay, whom he believes to be insufferably arrogant. The three knights' position on the bridge is thus more a symbolic stance than an absolute defence of the crossing.

Elsewhere in the *Morte Darthur*, we find King Pellynore, described as 'a knyght in the foreste that had rered up a pavylon by a welle'.[399] Pellynore has opted to 'guard' a different kind of strategic space, that of the well. Essentially, though, the procedure is just the same as with the other pavilion-owning knights. Pellynore's shield is hung outside and must be hit by a challenger in order to signify his acceptance of Pellynore's offer of a joust. The *Morte Darthur* also provides an interesting example of a variation

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[398] *Malory*, I, 275.
[399] *Malory*, I, 46.

in the customary form when it is Alys le Beall Pylgryme who puts up her pavilion by the side of the piece of ground that Alexander the Orphan is defending. Alexander has been forced into promising Morgan le Fay not to leave the grounds of her castle for twelve months. A damsel comes to his aid, saving him from what would otherwise have been a year-long period of inactivity and effective captivity by arranging for the castle to be completely burnt down. Alexander is able to declare that he will guard against all-comers the piece of ground upon which the castle formerly stood, thereby keeping his word to Morgan le Fay. Alys then publicly declares that whatever man can overcome Alexander while he guards the piece of land shall also win her and all her lands. In order to be always on hand to see the outcome of Alexander's battles, 'she dressed hir pavylion streyte by the pyese of erthe that sir Alysaundir kepte'.[400] We do not learn whether Alexander shares this tent accommodation, but the scene takes on a familiar appearance, composed as it is of a pavilion and a knight ready to joust with all-comers before it.

All the examples above have in common the voluntary nature of the challenge issued by the knight from his pavilion.[401] There are other instances, though, in which a knight claims rights over a certain space through the act of pitching a tent. He then determines to take on all passing knights, regardless of whether or not they have any wish to fight, refusing to allow them to continue on their way without a fight. Sir Torre encounters just such a case when he sets out after the knight who took a white brachet from Arthur's court, and is rather discourteously forced into a joust en route:

> ... as he [Torre] rode he mette with a dwarff suddeynly, that smote hys horse on the hede with a staff, that he reled bakwarde hys spere lengthe.
>
> 'Why dost thou so?' seyde sir Torre.
>
> 'For thou shalt nat passe thys way but if thou juste with yondir knyghtes of the pavilions.'
>
> Than was sir Torre ware where were two pavilions, and grete sperys stood oute, and two shildes hangynge on treys by the pavilions.[402]

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[400] *Malory*, II, 645.

[401] Malory, however, is a little ambiguous as to whether or not Pellynore forces his opponents to joust. In the corresponding section of the *Suite du Merlin*, the challenge does seem to be compulsory: *Lancelot-Grail*, IV, 179.

[402] *Malory*, I, 109. In the *Suite du Merlin* this episode is slightly less straightforward since it appears that Tor could refuse to joust but, according to the dwarf, would not then be a knight worthy of pursuing a quest. The dwarf adds that 'a valiant man cannot lose by delay, and here you can find out if you are worth anything', which presents the challenge to Tor in a much more positive light than in the *Morte Darthur* where the knights' challenge is simply a rude inconvenience; *Lancelot-Grail*, IV, 234.

Torre attempts to excuse himself by explaining that he is already on a quest and so cannot afford to be held up. The dwarf ignores this, however, telling Torre that he may not pass until he has jousted, and blows a horn to alert the two knights of the pavilions. These two knights are in fact easily overcome and the episode turns out to have been to Torre's advantage when the dwarf, impressed by Torre's deeds of arms, asks if he might now serve him. Torre accepts the offer of service and the dwarf proves very useful as he knows the whereabouts of the knight with the white brachet whom Torre seeks. This example is quite unusual, since knights rarely gain any material profit from fighting with a knight who has set up his pavilion as a challenge to all, aside from a possible increase in honour and reputation should they be able to defeat the opponent.

Even more unusually, in the thirteenth-century romance *Hunbaut*, the familiar motif is turned upon its head. In this tale, it is a group of ladies who have pitched their pavilions in the forest, and have devised a custom that is a female equivalent to the knight in his pavilion who challenges all-comers to joust before he permits them to pass on their way. In the Old French tale, Gawain comes across a lady, Ydone, in a beautiful pavilion, accompanied by several damsels who have evidently spent some time living there together at their leisure. The ladies' practice is to demand that any knight who comes by their pavilion must engage in debate with one of the women he finds there. Should the knight decline, his forfeit is to kiss one of the pavilion's occupants instead.[403] It is apparent from Gawain's reaction to Ydone and her companions that even such a light-hearted custom should be respected and taken seriously by the courteous knight. Gawain is preceded by another knight (later revealed as his brother, Gaheris) who has impolitely refused to stop before the pavilion, and Gawain determines to punish this discourtesy and bring its perpetrator back, by force if necessary, to apologise to Ydone. This curious example demonstrates that the motif was sufficiently common in the romance genre for the author of Hunbaut to play with and parody.

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[403] *The Romance of Hunbaut. An Arthurian Poem of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. by Margaret Winters, Davis Medieval Texts and Studies 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1984), ll. 2414-2653.

Knights in pavilions, seeking others with whom to joust, are scattered across Malory's landscape, but are rarely of much significance. They become just one more obstacle for a knight engaged in another quest or constitute an interlude, a mere detail in the chivalric fabric of the *Morte Darthur* as a whole. As with those who opt to camp at tournaments, the knights who pitch their pavilions in order to challenge others are usually the minor characters of Arthurian legend. King Pellynore is one exception to this, as is – once again – Tristram. When the latter is blown off course on his way to Ireland to fetch Isode for King Mark to marry, he lands on the coast of England, near Camelot:

> And whan they were londed sir Trystrames sette up his pavylyon uppon the londe of Camelot, and there he lete hange his shylde uppon the pavylyon.
>
> And that same day cam two knyghtes of kynge Arthures: that one was sir Ector de Marys, and that other was sir Morganoure. And thes two touched the shylde and bade hym com oute of the pavylyon for to juste and he wolde.
>
> 'Anone ye shall be answeryd,' seyde sir Trystramys, 'and ye woll tary a lytyll whyle.'[404]

Tristram sets up his pavilion in the typical way, to encourage knights errant to ask him to joust. He uses the tent not only as a practical form of lodging while on his expedition to Ireland but also, by displaying his shield outside, makes it clear to all onlookers that he would not be at all averse to a few jousts while he pauses in his journey.

There is little sense of any urgency for the business of King Mark's potential marriage as Tristram accepts the fact that he has been blown off course and uses it as an opportunity to test himself against some of Arthur's English knights. This apparent interlude, however, actually proves to be of crucial importance as it leads to Tristram winning favour with King Angwyshe of Ireland and consequently being allowed to take Isode back to Cornwall with him. Malory abbreviates but otherwise stays relatively faithful to his source (the *Prose Tristan*), in telling how Tristram successfully fights a judicial duel on Angwyshe's behalf with the renowned Sir Blamour de Ganys. In earlier versions of the Tristan legend, the hero wins favour with the Irish king rather differently, by killing a dragon, and Field and Vinaver argue that 'The whole evolution

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[404] *Malory*, I, 403-4.

of the Tristram story from a primitive tale to a romance of chivalry is reflected in the contrast between the epic fight with the dragon and the conventional romantic duel'.[405]

Aside from Malory, there are surprisingly few similar pavilion-dwelling knights in Middle English romance issuing their challenge to passers-by. In the Old French *Le Bel Inconnu* there is, however, Malgiers li Gris who is an interesting example of an unwanted defender of a causeway.[406] When encountered by the hero, Guinglain, Malgiers is over two-thirds of the way through a seven-year period in which he must successfully defend the causeway from all other knights in order to win the hand of la Pucele as Blances Mains. Malgiers's tent is positioned near the causeway that leads to la Pucele's city, Ile d'Or, so that he is forever ready to fight for her sake. Malgiers's custom of protecting the causeway has arisen, however, not from his own initiative but rather from the lady of the city. La Pucele much earlier decided that any suitor for her hand should prove himself worthy by defending the causeway for seven years. Despite her regrets and her horror at the idea of marrying Malgiers, la Pucele is bound by the terms she herself invented and must keep her word if Malgiers is successful throughout the seven-year term.

Malgiers, however, has perverted the spirit in which such challenges are usually conducted by his insistence on murdering every one of his opponents and his continual refusal to grant mercy to the defeated. In his position in his tent outside the city walls, but just before them and clearly in sight of all of Ile d'Or's citizens, Malgiers is constructed as a threatening external force. Placed where an enemy army might lie while conducting a siege, Malgiers is evidently distanced from the city and his habitation in his tent underlines his independence and isolation from Ile d'Or. Despite the fact that he is alone and not supported by the might of an army, Malgiers is well on his way to overcoming the defences of the city if he can endure in his present position for just two more years.

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[405] Commentary to *Malory*, III, 1462.

[406] See *Le Bel Inconnu*, ll. 1949-2053. There is no mention of a tent in the Middle English version of the tale; see *Lybeaus Desconus*, ed. by M. Mills, EETS 261 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), Cotton MS, ll. 1243-84.

The literary topos of the knight who pitches his pavilion to invite others to joust with him seems to have achieved considerable influence on real-life behaviour in medieval Europe. Certain individuals went to great expense in elaborate attempts to recreate the chivalric age as portrayed in romance. In 1449, for example, Jacques de Lalaing, councillor and chamberlain to Philip the Good of Burgundy undertook the *pas d'armes* of the Fountain of Tears. For this, a pavilion was constructed near Chalon sur Saône which is described as follows by Barber and Barker:

> At the pinnacle was an image of the Virgin, and below, the lady of the fountain, with her unicorn and the three shields; a cunningly arranged jet of water made her weep copiously, her tears running down over the shields.[407]

As with all the literary cases recounted above, the pavilion is hung with shields which a challenger would have touched to indicate his desire to fight. In this instance there were three different shields, each of which corresponded to a different form of combat, to be selected by the challenger.

A similar famous Spanish joust, the Passo Honroso in 1434, was organised by Suero de Quiñones and his companions with the aim of breaking three hundred lances in thirty days.[408] This was a clear attempt to emulate the exploits of romance heroes such as Alexander the Orphan, who performed extraordinary individual jousting feats. Accommodation for a temporary community was required while the challenge was underway, and twenty-two tents were put up at Orbigo along with a wooden dining hall. This was designed not only to house the knights, judges and heralds but also musicians, armourers, lance-makers and doctors. As is often the case in romance, where a knight will elect to guard a crossing-place at a river, the event took place at a bridge. In reality, however, matters proved much more difficult than in the tales, and only one hundred and eighty lances were broken, despite an extension of the original time limit.

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[407] Barber and Barker, *Tournaments*, p. 118.
[408] Barber and Barker, *Tournaments*, p. 100.

Recreational Pavilions

In contrast to the predominantly all-male and combat-associated contexts in which tents have so far been seen to appear, there are also a number of other uses for pavilions in medieval romance. Tents and pavilions are associated with entertainments such as hunting parties, celebrations including weddings and, above all, with lovers' trysts. While the tents of the medieval elite, with their desire to emulate the structures so lavishly described in romances and the chivalric deeds associated with them, could be described as largely recreational (as too could the fictional pavilions used for *pas d'armes* and tournaments), I intend, under my final heading of recreational pavilions, to limit my discussion to tents and pavilions that have no direct connection with fighting.

In the *Romance of Partenay*, for example, Melusine chooses to retire with Raymond into a pavilion on their wedding night. The pavilion, it is clear, has the potential to be as majestic a setting as one might find in a room of a palace, particularly when magically enhanced, as we can assume is the case here:

> Into a pauilon made she a retrair,
> Off whom moch cost the fourging and makyng;
> Portreid it was with briddes freshly,
> Thys fair pauilon rich was in seing;
> Forth anon the bede streight and made redy,
> Which with floure-delise couerid was to ey.[409]

Melusine's choice of lodging may also reflect her status as a fairy since, as noted above, the fairy mistress is often found by her human lover in just such a pavilion. Historically too, though, pavilions were used in wedding celebrations. Lachaud cites the occasion of the marriage of the Duke of Brabant to Margaret, daughter of Edward I, in London in 1290, for which the duke and his entourage were provided with tents as sleeping quarters.[410] In the *Romance of Partenay*, tents are likewise used to accommodate the influx of guests for the wedding. To some extent, this is a practical way of housing all the visitors but it is by no means an indication of economy since the pavilions are so sumptuous. Even the guest of honour, the Earl of Poitiers, is suitably housed in a 'ful

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[409] *The Romance of Partenay or of Lusignan*, ed. Walter W. Skeat, EETS 22 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1866), ll. 1001-6.

[410] Frédérique Lachaud, 'Les Tentes et l'activité militaire. Les Guerres d'Edouard Ier Plantagenet (1272-1307)', *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome: Moyen Âge*, 3:1 (1999), 443-61 (p. 443).

fair pauilon'.[411] The pavilions may indeed be intended to contribute to the festive, celebratory atmosphere, adding to the visual spectacle.

The *Romance of Partenay* also shows us the versatility of the tent form; a range of functions for tents, from the decorative to the practical, is apparent. Even the wedding guests' horses are sheltered in tents:

> Ther coursers loged passing inly wel,
> Both rekke and manger at their ease gan make,
> Inssyde tentes ful fair eueridel.[412]

Tents clearly have the potential to enclose very different types of living space, from the grandiose accommodation fit for the nobility to their use as stables. In romance as a whole, they are used not only for special festivities such as weddings but also for more routine recreational pursuits. Thus, for example, in the *Morte Darthur* Sir Persaunte of Inde has a habit of regularly spending time in tents and pavilions that are placed only a stone's throw away from his city. The damsel Lyonet explains this to Gareth when they come across a meadow containing many pavilions:

> yondir is a lorde that owyth yondir cyté, and his custom is, whan the wedir is fayre, to lye in this medow, to juste and to turnay. And ever there is aboute hym fyve hondred knyghtes and jantyllmen of armys, and there is all maner of gamys that ony jantyllman can devyse.[413]

Sir Persaunte has moved, along with all his followers, outside the confines of his city to take advantage of the good weather so that they can entertain themselves with a variety of knightly sports, all of which have in common the need for a large, open space. Persaunte is at the centre of this gathering with his distinctive pavilion which is 'all of the coloure of inde'. Indeed, we are further told that 'all maner of thyng that there is aboute, men and women and horsis, trapped shyldis and sperys, was all of the coloure of inde'. Persaunte has very carefully colour co-ordinated not only his trappings and his servants' liveries, but even his pavilion. His very identity, as Sir Persaunte of Inde, is thereby plain for all to see, even from a distance, in the colours emblazoned across the meadow. The meadow is simply an extension of his city, very much part of the

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[411] *Romance of Partenay*, l. 911.
[412] *Romance of Partenay*, ll. 912-14. Records survive showing that tents were sometimes used as stables in the Middle Ages; see Drew, *Tensile Architecture*, p. 109.
[413] *Malory*, I, 311.

property over which Persaunte is lord, and he is the clear patron of the games held upon it. Whereas a city cannot be so easily or completely stamped with its lord's identity, Persaunte's tented community reveals its allegiances at a glance.

As well as establishing leisure space that can be appended to a city or castle, tents can be useful for jaunts further afield such as hunting parties, a popular form of entertainment amongst the nobility. A group of pavilions can create a civilised oasis when set up amidst the wilderness of the forest, and the hunting can go on around this small area of 'tamed' space. In the *Morte Darthur* Mark and Isode embark upon just such an expedition, accompanied by Tristram and many more of their knights, and Malory tells us that 'the kynge and the quene made their pavylons and their tentes in that foreste besyde a ryver, and there was dayly justyng and huntyng'.[414] Clearly women can accompany the men on these sorts of excursions, and in *Ipomadon* the female ruler, the Fere, even initiates one herself. The good weather, sweet-smelling plants and birdsong combine to give her the desire to order a hunting party:

> Vppon a lavnde fayre and wyde
> Be a rennande reuer syde
> They sett that ladyes tente.
> There was the dere won
> When they were wery for-rwne
> Wythe baynge on the bente;
> Or any reysyd oute of araye,
> Grette herttys to byde the bay
> To the watter wente.
>
> Logys and pavelons they pyghte
> For erle, baron and for knyghte
> That huntyd in that foreste.[415]

Temporary lodges and pavilions give the Fere a comfortable vantage point, situated near where the deer are most often chased and finally slaughtered, so that she can watch the culmination of the hunt. The sport goes on for several days, with the pavilions used as overnight accommodation and for dining. Although it is the Fere who decides to hold this hunting expedition, she remains a spectator of events, in which only men can participate.

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[414] *Malory*, I, 427.
[415] *Ipomadon*, ll. 578-89.

Women appear far more frequently, and in a more prominent role, in the pavilions of romance as lovers. As with Tristram and Isode's pavilions at the tournament of Lonezep, the space encompassed by a tent may afford a couple a degree of privacy, or freedom from social restraint, that would not be possible in a conventional medieval household or court. In the *Morte Darthur*, Torre comes across two pavilions that accommodate one such couple:

> He saw three damesels lye in hyt [i.e. the first pavilion] on a paylette slepynge; and so he wente unto the tother pavylyon and founde a lady lyynge in hit slepynge, but therein was the whyght brachett that bayed at hym faste.[416]

The pavilions belong to the knight who took the white brachet from Arthur's court, although he is currently absent. We are not told why the knight has chosen to pitch his pavilions in this place, nor for how long he intends to live in them. The pair of pavilions clearly accommodates a miniature household, however, with the knight and his lover sleeping in one pavilion while the damsels who attend on the lady sleep in the adjacent tent.

Many sexual relationships are pursued in the pavilions of the romance corpus and, unsurprisingly given his womanising reputation, Gawain is involved in several such scenarios. Although the beginning of the Middle English *Jeaste of Sir Gawain* is now lost, it seems likely from its French source, the first continuation of Chrétien's *Perceval*, that the *Jeaste* would have described Gawain as riding in the forest when by chance he comes across a lady in a pavilion.[417] The surviving text tells of Gawain's seduction of the lady and the subsequent discovery of the pair by her father, Sir Gylbert. Gylbert is understandably angry and seeks redress by fighting with Gawain. The father is, however, overcome by the hero and the remainder of this uninspiring romance consists of the lady's three brothers each challenging Gawain in turn at the pavilion, in order to avenge their father. None are successful and although Gawain's behaviour is somewhat questionable, the situation of the lady in her pavilion, alone in a forest, has

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[416] *Malory*, I, 110.

[417] *The Jeaste of Sir Gawain*, in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. by Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1995); and *The Continuations of the Old French 'Perceval'*, I, 2547-987.

clear erotic implications. Gawain's actions thus appear to have been more a response to a sexual invitation rather than a seduction initiated only on his part.

The Gawain of the *Morte Darthur* displays a similarly opportunistic attitude when he seduces Ettarde in her pavilions, although Malory interestingly does alter his source, the *Suite du Merlin*, in order to make Gawain's behaviour more reprehensible. Gawain meets Ettarde when he volunteers to help Sir Pelleas, a knight whose love for her has long gone unrequited. Despite swearing faithfully to change Ettarde's disdainful attitude towards Pelleas, Malory's Gawain immediately sets out to seduce the lady himself. He wins her favour by borrowing Pelleas's arms and claiming that he has slain her suitor. Ettarde is so pleased that she tells Gawain, 'And for ye have slayne hym I shall be your woman and to do onythynge that may please you.'[418] He then, rather manipulatively, declares that he loves her and that it is she herself that he wishes as his reward. In the *Suite*, by contrast, Gauvain and Ettarde genuinely fall in love, causing Gauvain to forget his vow to Pellias. The French lovers are both virgins before they sleep together in the pavilions (there is no mention of this in Malory's version), and are portrayed as far more innocent.[419]

Malory's Ettarde puts up little resistance (although, in her defence, she does believe Pelleas to be dead) and certainly does not come across as an unwilling victim of Gawain's sexual exploitation:

> So hit was in the monthe of May that she and sir Gawayne wente oute of the castell and sowped in a pavylyon, and there was made a bedde, and there sir Gawayne and Ettarde wente to bedde togedyrs. And in another pavylyon she leyde hir damesels, and in the thirde pavylyon she leyde parte of hir knyghtes, for than she had no drede of sir Pelleas. And there sir Gawayne lay with hir in the pavylyon two dayes and two nyghtes.[420]

By this time, Pelleas's suspicions are aroused and so one night he rides to the three pavilions, looking in each one in turn. He first sees the knights and squires, then the gentlewomen and finally enters the last tent to see 'sir Gawayne lyggyng in the bed with

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[418] *Malory*, I, 169.
[419] The French Gauvain also later regrets his shameful actions and succeeds in reconciling Ettarde with Pellias so that the couple eventually marry. Malory's resolution is much darker: the Damsel of the Lake intervenes to reverse the direction of the unrequited love between Pelleas and Ettarde, resulting in Ettarde's eventual death from sorrow.
[420] *Malory*, I, 169-70.

his lady Ettarde and aythir clyppynge other in armys'. Despite his fury and sorrow at this exposure of Gawain's falsity, Pelleas is too honourable to murder the pair while they are asleep, so he simply draws his sword and lays the blade across their throats, in a symbolic gesture very reminiscent of King Mark in the Tristan legend.[421] It would be all too easy for him to kill the sleeping occupants: another reminder that although the pavilion, with its easy access, is a setting well-suited to seduction, it is equally not a place in which one should feel at all secure from an enemy.[422]

Hines makes a convincing argument for the way in which the accessible nature of the tent-form can facilitate acts of seduction in his analysis of Diomede and Criseyde's relationship in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. Chaucer sets up a clear opposition between the city space of Troy and the encampment of the besieging Greeks:

> In the Greek camp we have only tents, which offer a plain inside / outside dichotomy. The space inside these tents is necessarily much more variable in function, more easily redesignated at will or at need as a living space, a dining space, or a sleeping space.[423]

The tent encloses 'an undivided and readily accessible space' in which Criseyde must sleep, eat and spend her days, rather than providing rooms with separate functions such as exist in a house.[424] The tent's very lack of structure offers Diomede much more immediate and closer access to Criseyde's intimate space than he would have been able to gain by meeting her in a conventional dwelling, and thereby accelerates the speed with which he is able to displace her affections from Troilus to himself. Although I agree with Hines's reading of this episode in *Troilus*, I also believe it is important not to underestimate the degree of complexity that can be achieved within tent-space. Although boundaries may be invisible, they may be nonetheless real, as Hoang illustrates in his discussion of the arrangement of space in Mongul tents.[425] Mongul tent interiors are divided according to precise rules: at the back is space for the tent-owner

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[421] Mark finds Tristan and Iseut in the forest, sleeping together with a sword lying between them, and replaces it with his own. Unlike Pelleas, though, Mark wrongly believes the lovers to be living together chastely. See Béroul, *The Romance of Tristan*, ed. and trans. by Norris J. Lacy (London: Garland, 1989), l. 2020.

[422] Occasionally, pavilions are also the setting for rape. See, for example, *Rigomer*, ll. 7823-956.

[423] John Hines, *Voices in the Past: English Literature and Archaeology* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), p. 126.

[424] Hines, *Voices in the Past*, p. 123.

[425] Michael Hoang, *Genghis Khan*, trans. by Ingrid Cranfield (London: Saqi Books, 1990), p. 59.

and his family, on the right (facing the door) is a place of honour, while the two sides are for guests (women on the eastern side, men on the western). Domestic servants and poor relations have quarters near the entrance, where animals are also housed in winter.

In most medieval romances, however, there is little description of the arrangement of the internal space of tents and it is usually a safe assumption that a lady in a pavilion pitched somewhere in the countryside constitutes a sexual invitation. Homan observes that 'a long history links tent-related architecture to the erotic', and the connection is certainly much in evidence in romance.[426] This link is very effectively exploited in *La Queste del Saint Graal*, during an episode in which Perceval is tempted during his quest for the Grail. The inducement to sin for Perceval is of a sexual nature, since his great strength is that he is a virgin knight. A gentlewoman (who is in actual fact a fiend of hell) attempts to lure Perceval into her service, and is successful in persuading him to promise to help her. She then uses the excuse of the weather to pitch a pavilion in which she will proceed with her seduction. Malory's version of the episode closely follows the French *Queste* at this point:

> And at that tyme the wedir was hote. Than she called unto her a jantillwoman and bade hir brynge forth a pavilion. And so she ded and pyghte hit uppon the gravell.
>
> 'Sir,' seyde she, 'now may ye reste you in thys hete of thys day.'[427]

Perceval falls asleep inside the pavilion for a time, and is then fed with a generous array of foods and plied with strong wine. As a result he is suddenly consumed with desire for the lady. She is only too happy to oblige once she has elicited Perceval's promise that he will be her 'trew servaunte', and so 'two squyres were commaunded to make a bedde in myddis of the pavelon, and anone she was unclothed and leyde therein'.[428] It is only when Perceval catches sight of the red cross in the pommel of his sword and remembers his religion that he is saved from committing mortal sin. Perceval crosses himself, and the gesture has an instant and dramatic effect on the pavilion in which he was so nearly undone: 'And therewith the pavylon turned up-so-downe and than hit

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[426] Homan, 'To Your Tents', p. 79.
[427] *Malory*, II, 917.
[428] *Malory*, II, 918.

chonged unto a smooke and a blak clowde'.[429] The pavilion, and the evil that it signified, is overturned by the power of the sign of the Cross.

In the *Queste*, a hermit explains in some detail to Perceval the significance of his experience with the fiendish woman and, in particular, the symbolism of the tent. Malory significantly abbreviates this and chooses not to include his source's explanation that

> Li paveillons, qui ert reonz a la maniere de la circonstance dou monde, senefie tout apertement le monde, qui ja ne sera sanz perchié; et por ce que pechiez i abite toz dis ne volt ele mie que tu fusses herbergiez fors ou paveillon: et por ce le te fist ele apareillier.
>
> The tent, which was round like the circumference of the earth, clearly represents the world, which will never be without sin. It is because sin always resides therein that she did not want you to remain outside the tent; indeed that is why she had it set up for you.[430]

The hermit adds that Jesus Christ is the sun and therefore the tent was actually shading Perceval from the Saviour's goodness. Malory contents himself with simply explaining that the woman was in reality a fiend and leaving parallels to be drawn between this tent as a scene of temptation with the common role of tents in romance as locations for sexual liaisons.

Chrétien de Troyes also plays with the potentially seedy associations of pavilions at the beginning of the *Conte du Graal* to create a measure of irony in the scene in which Perceval mistakes a beautiful pavilion (containing a lone female) for a church. His error arises from the inadequacies of his mother's teaching: he confidently assumes that the tent is God's house, declaring to himself that

> Voir dist ma mere tote voie
> Qui me dist que mostiers estoit
> La plus bele chose qui soit,
> Et me dist que ja ne trovaisse
> Mostier qu'aorer n'i alaisse
> Le Creator en cui je croi.[431]

> [My mother spoke the absolute truth when she said that a church is the most beautiful thing there is and told me never to come across one without going in to worship the Creator in whom I believe.]

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[429] *Malory*, II, 918-19.
[430] *La Queste del Saint Graal: roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. by Albert Pauphilet, CFMA 33 (Paris: Champion, 1923), p. 114.
[431] *Conte du Graal*, ll. 658-63.

Instead of God, however, Perceval finds a maiden sleeping in a bed within the pavilion, whom he insists upon kissing. Chrétien sets Perceval's comical naivety against the very apparent sexual possibilities of the situation, and does so partly by his use of the amorous setting of a lovers' pavilion in the woods.

Malory similarly turns to comic advantage the common romance associations of tents with love and sex in an incident involving Lancelot. Upon this occasion, Lancelot decides to sleep in a pavilion he has come across after losing his way in the forest. Matters then take an unexpected turn as

> within an owre there com that knyght that ought the pavylyon. He wente that his lemman had layne in that bed, and so he leyde hym adowne by sir Launcelot and toke hym in his armys and began to kysse hym.[432]

Realising his mistake, as Lancelot awakes to feel a beard against his face, the knight of the pavilion (Sir Belleus) and Lancelot go outside and fight. Lancelot severely wounds Belleus, who then explains the reason for his mistake in the following terms:

> 'Sir,' sayde the knyghte, 'the pavylyon is myne owne. And as this nyght I had assigned my lady to have slepte with hir, and now I am lykly to dye of this wounde.'[433]

Belleus's reasoning is perfectly logical: he evidently expected to find no one asleep in the bed in his own pavilion other than the woman with whom he had previously arranged a rendezvous. While Belleus is not criticised for partaking in what appears to be an illicit sexual liaison, there is perhaps, in his experience with Lancelot, an ironic comment on the dangers (spiritual and physical) of such sexual encounters. Ultimately, however, Belleus's experience serves him well as Lancelot regrets wounding him so badly over what was merely a case of mistaken identity. As reparation, Belleus's lady requests that Lancelot assists her lover in becoming a knight of the Round Table; Lancelot promises to do all he can, and a little later Belleus is indeed admitted to the Arthurian fellowship.

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[432] *Malory*, I, 259.
[433] *Malory*, I, 260. The episode is based on the *Prose Lancelot*, although Malory lightens its tone by allowing Belleus to survive.

Conclusion

The notional categories used above are by no means mutually exclusive but serve to demonstrate the versatility of the tent structure. As Drew remarks, tents come from humble origins:

> Tents arose where two conditions prevailed; a shortage of suitable building materials and a need for mobility. The tent required less material to enclose space than most other types of construction and this peculiar advantage made it ideal as a light portable shelter in regions where inadequate resources dictated a nomadic form of economy.[434]

By the Middle Ages, it is clear that the tent form, in both romance and reality, still offers great benefits – because of its practical and inexpensive nature – to armies engaged in campaigns or sieges. It is also evident, however, that by this period the deceptively simple structure of the tent had been appropriated for many other purposes, many of which required far more extravagant and luxurious constructions.

As real-life tents and pavilions developed throughout the Middle Ages, they became more and more architecturally complex and fanciful. The culmination of this trend in Western Europe must undoubtedly have been at the meeting of the French and English at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in June 1520. On the English side, arrangements were placed in the hands of Richard Gibson, serjeant of the king's tents and serjeant of revels.[435] He was responsible for a combination of architectural and tent structures, in deliberate imitation of the idealised settings of romance. So, for example, Henry VIII's banqueting hall had stone foundations and brick walls but the rest of the structure was wood and canvas:

> The whole was covered outside by cloth painted to resemble brickwork *à l'antique*. Inside was tapestry of cloth of gold and silver, interlaced with the king's personal colours of white and green. The house contained 4 great *corps de maison* and 8 *salons* ... . At one door there were 2 gilt pillars, bearing statues of Cupid and Bacchus, from which flowed streams of malmsey and claret into silver cups for any who wished to drink. The whole scene seemed to the beholder to be very much attuned to the days of the knights errant.[436]

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[434] Drew, *Tensile Architecture*, p. xvii.

[435] For more information on the role of the Master of the King's Tents in an earlier period of history, see Francis Pierrepont Barnard, *Edward IV's French Expedition of 1475* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925; repr. Dursley: Gloucester Reprints, 1975), pp. 134-5.

[436] Neville Williams, 'The Master of the Royal Tents and his Records', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 2 (1960-4), 47-51 (p. 48).

Added onto this central structure were a vast number of tents and pavilions, many of which were interlinked, to enhance further the impression that an extensive temporary palace had been created.

Drew observes that, by the early sixteenth century, architectural themes were becoming ever more conspicuous in tent building: 'The roof and wall cloths of the tents were divided into panels with columns, trefoils, quatrefoils and ogee arches borrowed from gothic architecture.'[437] He adds that the 'vertical walls and steep roofs, modelled on domestic architecture, disregarded the most elementary considerations of statics and wind loads'.[438] The tent form developed away from its military roots, although retaining the original association with power. A splendid pavilion was seen to contribute well to the image of a cultured ruler, harking back as it did to the era of romance tales and echoing the lost grandeur of a supposed past.

Medieval literary representations show us the tent in both its extremes of form, from its role in military campaigns to its construction as a luxury item par excellence, and thereby demonstrate its enormous adaptability. Tents and pavilions are useful for both war and pleasure, may be lived in by either sex, and can either form an independent residence for a single knight or be part of a much larger community such as a king's retinue. The act of pitching a pavilion sometimes equates to laying claim to a piece of ground or space and is, therefore, a declaration of certain rights over that space. It can likewise also be a way of creating a personal 'island' away from others, a means of gaining privacy and a method by which one's identity may be concealed.

In addition, the pavilion as a literary topos had become a multifaceted symbol by the later Middle Ages; amongst other things, it might indicate the social status of the occupant, signal the desire of a knight to joust, or hint at the sexual availability of a lady. Tents are perhaps presented a little differently in epic and *chansons de geste*, in which they appear mostly in martial contexts, with more emphasis on interior decoration and less on the range of functions than in later chivalric romance. The tents

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[437] Drew, *Tensile Architecture*, pp. 114-15.

[438] Indeed, at the Field of the Cloth of Gold, most of the French pavilions had to be taken down after just four days because of wind and rain; see Joycelyne G. Russell, *The Field of the Cloth of Gold: Men and Manners in 1520* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), pp. 30-1.

and pavilions of Old French romance also more commonly have magical properties than their Middle English counterparts, but this is part of a general difference in attitude towards magic rather than being specific to tent description.[439] Aside from this, French and English romance have much in common, in their full exploitation of the tent as a feature of the romance landscape.

This includes many dramatisations of the drawbacks of the tent form: in particular the ease with which tents can come under attack. A striking exception is the magically-enhanced pavilion of *Jaufre*, given to the hero by the Fada de Gibel, which comes close to perfection of its kind.[440] It is flame-retardant, waterproof even were it to rain for a year, and also folds up so small that a single wagon could carry it, along with a great deal of other equipment. Even this amazing pavilion, however, might be accessed by an enemy as easily as any other tent and fall prey to his schemes. Although some French romances do attribute protective qualities to their pavilions, texts more often find interest in the fact that tents are not invulnerable.[441]

It is therefore all the more ironic that grand pavilions, or large-scale encampments, can be a symbol of power or make a claim to the area of space they enclose. There is something inherently contradictory about the tent-form: it is temporary, portable, versatile and independent, yet dangerously accessible and vulnerable at the same time. Tents and pavilions, ranging from the practical to the purely decorative, appear frequently in the corpus of romance. They are not used extensively by the knight-hero as accommodation, but are frequently encountered as the knight pursues his adventures. While offering the author the opportunity for elaborate description and imaginative excess, tents also remain a very functional story element. They facilitate the movement and distribution of characters around the landscape, as well as setting the scene for certain events, such as a siege, tournament or lovers' tryst. Tents, as we have seen, have numerous associations that influence the manner in which

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[439] On the preference of English writers for at least some degree of plausibility, contrasted with the more fantastic nature of French and Italian romance, see Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 130-1.

[440] See *Jaufre*, ll. 10,538-49.

[441] Castellani, for example, cites the *Roman d'Alexandre*. It features a marvellous tent into which serpents, madmen and loose women cannot enter (ll. 3395-3411); see 'La Description de la tente', p. 327.

they are read in specific contexts, and it is remarkable that this versatile potential has been so often passed over by critics as just another set-piece of medieval romance.

Chapter Four: The Knight and the City

So far, my thesis has concentrated upon travel in medieval romance and narrative elements that facilitate movement of the protagonists. In this final chapter, however, I turn to the more problematic, static setting of the city and seek to understand how towns and cities can be made to fit into the essentially fluid structure of a romance. Typically, medieval romances focus upon a knight-errant and his progress through a formulaic landscape, such as that described by Pearsall and Salter:

> The recurring pattern of romance is of a journey through a wild forest or undifferentiated wilderness, broken here and there by pockets of idealized garden or meadow landscape with paradisal associations.[442]

There is, significantly, no mention of a town or city amongst these familiar elements. Nonetheless, urban space does feature in many romances, in which cities most often appear as targets of a siege. In this context, however, the city is usually presented as a fortress rather than possessing characteristics specific to an urban settlement.[443]

I have chosen to focus in this chapter on two romances, *Le Bel Inconnu* and *Partonope of Blois*, that are unusual and interesting because each features a city as one of its most prominent settings.[444] Neither text is centrally about sieges and both authors display an interest in deliberately exploiting their settings, and the set-pieces of romance, with unconventional results. The two romances fascinatingly dramatise the conflict between knightly activity (which more or less assumes movement and travel) and the inherent immobility of a city. Furthermore, the most important cities and towns

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[442] Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter, *Landscape and Seasons of the Medieval World* (London: Elek, 1973), p. 51.

[443] See Malcolm Hebron, *The Medieval Siege: Theme and Image in Middle English Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), who claims that 'in Western Europe in the later Middle Ages, sieges were usually of castles, and this had an important effect on literary descriptions, which often ... depict a city or town as a fortress' (p. 21). For a study of urban space in French romance, see G.D. West, 'The Description of Towns in Old French Verse Romances', *French Studies*, 11 (1957), 50-9. On the depiction of the city in medieval art, see Pierre Lavedan, *Représentation des villes dans l'art du moyen âge* (Paris: Vanoest, 1954).

[444] This is indicated by the frequency of the words *cité/cyte* and *vile/towne*, which occur fifty-two times in *Le Bel Inconnu* and fifty-seven times in *Partonope of Blois*. Chrétien de Troyes, by contrast, uses the comparable terms *cité*, *vile* and *borc* much less often: for example, they appear just ten times in *Erec et Enide* and only five times in *Yvain*.

in each text are firmly associated with female governance and stationary, urban space is thus initially gendered as feminine.[445]

Immediately, a conflict of loyalties and ideologies can be anticipated: each hero struggles to choose whether or not to stay with his lover, in a city setting that cuts him off from the rest of the romance world and therefore also from the potential to win renown. The dilemma is one that is proposed in varying forms in many romances, in which a knight achieves his desired lady but then struggles to combine the romantic relationship with chivalric activity. As Elizabeth Edwards remarks of Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain*, 'to stay with the beloved is to risk censure for sloth, and to go on adventures is to risk alienation from the beloved'.[446] In *Erec et Enide* too, marriage proves detrimental to Erec's reputation since his obsessive love for Enide causes him to abandon all knightly pursuits.

As Cohen observes, 'the knight who ... settles down with a wife in a comfortable castle ceases to be the protagonist of his narrative; the story ends when the performance of his identity finds a stable, stagnant resting place'.[447] The castle or city therefore generally marks the end of a knight's quest and signals marriage and recognition of his achievements. In *Partonope of Blois*, however, the hero is offered his lover and her realm without having undergone a single trial of his knightly prowess; the proffered gift of Melior and Chef d'Oire is unearned and comes unusually early in the narrative. The hero of *Le Bel Inconnu*, meanwhile, is confused by the merits of two competing women, each of whom is firmly attached to a town or city and desirable lands. As the two romances progress, the poets explore and renegotiate the relationships between knight-hero and lady/ladies largely in terms of movement and space. Joan Ferrante has drawn attention to the striking importance of female characters in twelfth-century literature (and this is certainly one of the features retained in the fifteenth-century Middle English *Partonope*):

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[445] For an interesting discussion of the urban landscape of *Le Bel Inconnu*, see Michelle Szkilnik, 'Villes et châteaux dans *Le Bel Inconnu*', *Op. cit. Revue de littératures française et comparée*, 7 (1996), 37-45.
[446] Elizabeth Edwards, 'The Place of Women in the *Morte Darthur*', in *A Companion to Malory*, ed. by Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards (Cambridge: Brewer, 1996), pp. 37-54 (p. 41).
[447] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters and the Middle Ages* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 75.

> They are not portrayed as 'real people' with human problems; they are symbols, aspects of philosophical and psychological problems that trouble the male world.[448]

Even so, women appear to figure to an unusual extent in the two romances under consideration, in which there are a number of authoritative female rulers.[449]

The aim of this fourth chapter, then, is to look at the opposition between motion and immobility in these two romances, and the ways in which a knight can occupy, and interact with, urban space. This will involve analysing the narrative structure of each text, including its geographical and temporal framework. I will then look more closely at the ways in which the various cities and towns are mediated to the reader, and their positions within the wider landscape of the whole romance. Finally, I intend to focus upon the way in which urban space is closely connected with women in both *Le Bel Inconnu* and *Partonope*. The portrayal of the cities is strongly linked with the characterisation of their female rulers, and the pairings evolve together during the course of the romances.

Firstly, though, I will provide some background information on the two texts in question, including brief summaries. Renaut de Bâgé's *Le Bel Inconnu*, probably written in the late twelfth century, is an early example of literary innovation in a romance text composed just after the works of Chrétien de Troyes.[450] One of its most striking features is the way in which it acknowledges its own fictional nature in its narrator's plea at the conclusion to his beloved. The narrator claims that if his lady should deign to look kindly upon him, he will continue the tale and allow the hero to be reunited with his lover (la Pucele as Blances Mains). Versions of the romance survive in Italian, Middle English and Middle-High German, but none of these retain the open

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[448] Joan M. Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature from the Twelfth Century to Dante* (London: Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 1.

[449] As Weiss points out, *Le Bel Inconnu* and *Partonopeus* are highly unusual because of the active role played by their heroines; elsewhere, 'wooing women are not the heroines of French romances; they are not presented with sympathy or admiration'. See Judith Weiss, 'The Wooing Woman in Anglo-Norman Romance', in *Romance in Medieval England*, ed. by Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows and Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991), pp. 149-61 (p. 149).

[450] All citations refer to Renaut de Beaujeu, *Le Bel Inconnu*, ed. by G. Perrie Williams, CFMA 38 (Paris: Champion, 1929); translations are based on those in Renaut de Bâgé, *Le Bel Inconnu (Li Biaus Descouneüs; The Fair Unknown)*, ed. by Karen Fresco and trans. by Colleen P. Donagher (London: Garland, 1992).

ending with its teasing promise of possible continuation and, indeed, no continuation exists even in French. The Middle English adaptation *Lybeaus Desconus*, attributable to Thomas Chestre, was probably composed between 1375 and 1400 and is a significantly pared down and inferior version of the Fair Unknown tale, yet of some interest for purposes of comparison.[451]

Partonope of Blois, on the other hand, is a mid-fifteenth century Middle English translation that, despite minor differences between the endings and occasional changes in emphasis and detail, remains quite faithful to the surviving manuscripts of its source, the Old French *Partonopeus de Blois*.[452] The Old French text dates from roughly the same period as *Le Bel Inconnu* and is traditionally placed around 1182-1185, although Simons and Eley have more recently made a strong case for an earlier dating of around 1170, which would make *Partonopeus* contemporaneous with the composition of Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec et Enide* and, most significantly, put it a few years earlier than Chrétien's other romances.[453] *Partonopeus's* similarities with *Yvain* in particular have often been noted by critics but, as Simons and Eley suggest, the fact that Chrétien's innovation is generally attributed to his brilliant *re*-working of stock romance material means that it would be possible to see *Partonopeus* as one of his sources rather than vice-versa. While the dating issue cannot be definitively resolved, it is evident that the *Partonopeus* author is a highly innovative poet.

As in *Le Bel Inconnu*, the narrator of *Partonopeus* appeals for his lady's favour in order to continue his tale, and in this case a continuation does survive, although it is unclear whether it was written by the same poet. The Middle English version does not

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[451] For discussion of the source of *Lybeaus*, see *Lybeaus Desconus*, ed. by M. Mills, EETS 261 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), who judges it 'possible that he [Thomas Chestre, supposed author of *Lybeaus*] had been acquainted with some text of Renaut's poem ... as well as with other related material' (pp. 50-1). All quotations are taken from Mills's edition, which gives in parallel the texts of Cotton Caligula A.II and Lambeth Palace 306.

[452] All quotations are taken from *The Middle English Versions of Partonope of Blois*, ed. by A. Trampe Bödtker, EETS ES 109 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1912; repr. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2002); for the old French text, see *'Partonopeus de Blois': An Online Edition*, ed. by Penny Eley and others (Sheffield: HriOnline, 2005), <www.hrionline.ac.uk/partonopeus>.

[453] See Penny Simons and Penny Eley, 'The Prologue to *Partonopeus de Blois*: Text, Context and Subtext', *French Studies*, 49 (1995), 1-16; and '*Partonopeus de Blois* and Chrétien de Troyes: A Re-assessment', *Romania*, 117 (1999), 316-41. It must freely be admitted that the chronology of Chrétien's work is itself a matter of debate and uncertainty, on which subject see Joseph J. Duggan, *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 8-23.

retain this feature and concludes simply with the wedding of hero and heroine.[454] As Brenda Hosington notes,

> *Partonope of Blois* is a translation in which unusually close renderings exist side by side with paraphrase. The author has mingled respect for his source text with a freedom that enabled him to produce a romance that is in fact a poem in its own right.[455]

The relationship between the French and English versions of this romance is therefore quite different from that between *Le Bel Inconnu* and the degenerate *Lybeaus Desconus*. I therefore propose to study the Fair Unknown tale in its Old French form and *Partonope* in the Middle English adaptation – although, where relevant, reference will be made to *Lybeaus Desconus* and *Partonopeus de Blois*.

Summaries of the Texts

Le Bel Inconnu

The romance begins at the Arthurian court in Caerlion where the Fair Unknown (who is later named as Guinglain, son of Gawain) undertakes a journey with a damsel, Helie, who is seeking help for her mistress, the queen of Wales. The Fair Unknown proves his prowess as they travel by defeating several knights and two giants. After a time, he passes through a series of towns, the first of which is Becleu where he defeats its lord, Giflet, in the Sparrowhawk Challenge. From there he arrives at Ile d'Or and, in order to gain entry, defeats Malgiers, a knight who has sworn to defend the causeway. The town's mistress, la Pucele as Blances Mains, demonstrates her gratitude by offering herself in marriage to Guinglain. Despite falling in love with her, Guinglain is reminded by Helie of his avowed quest and so secretly departs without taking leave.

He then successfully overcomes Lampart at Galigans, thereby earning the right to hospitality in that town, rather than the shameful treatment that the citizens mete out

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[454] The adventures of Anselot and the return of the Sultan (the subjects of the Old French continuation), however, are alluded to earlier in the tale – with the implication that they will be detailed later – but no continuation survives.

[455] Brenda Hosington, '*Partonopeu de Blois* and its Fifteenth-Century English Translation: A Medieval Translator at Work', in *The Medieval Translator II*, ed. by Roger Ellis (London: Queen Mary and Westfield College, 1992), pp. 231-52 (p. 252).

to vanquished knights. This brings the Fair Unknown finally to the Gaste Cité of Senaudon, where he defeats two enchanter-knights and submits to 'le Fier Baissier' [the Fearsome Kiss] from a serpent (the enchanted Blonde Esmerée, the queen whom he had set out to rescue). A mysterious voice then reveals Guinglain's name and parentage. Esmerée, now free from her enchantment, wishes to marry Guinglain but he is lovesick for la Pucele as Blances Mains. Returning to Ile d'Or, he eventually obtains la Pucele's pardon, after suffering some humiliating enchantments at her hands as a punishment for his previous abrupt departure. His happy life with la Pucele proves short-lived, however, as Guinglain cannot resist returning to participate in a tournament in the Arthurian world. Once there he is easily persuaded to marry Blonde Esmerée instead.

Partonope of Blois

The young hero, Partonope, is lost in the forest of Ardennes after hunting a boar with his uncle, the king of France. He comes across an unmanned ship and falls asleep on board, awakening to find to his consternation that he is at sea and the ship is apparently sailing itself. After some time he reaches a harbour by a beautiful city, but is dismayed to find that it too is deserted. Invisible agents serve him dinner and lead him to a bedchamber. While Partonope lies in bed in darkness he is joined by an unseen woman who orders him to leave. He begs mercy, and later grows bold enough seemingly to rape her. It transpires however that the lady, Melior, has magically orchestrated events to bring Partonope to her kingdom, Chef d'Oire in Byzantium, as she wishes to marry him. Two and a half years must pass, though, before the marriage can take place, and Partonope is forbidden to see her during this time, although he can spend each night with her.[456]

After a year, Partonope asks leave to visit Blois again and wins great renown by helping the French defeat Saracen invaders. His mother, however, has severe reservations about his relationship with the invisible Melior and plots to get her son

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[456] The enforced delay appears somewhat arbitrary considering that Partonope is eighteen years old, but derives from the Old French *Partonopeus* in which the hero is only thirteen and therefore initially too young to be presented to Melior's subjects as a credible husband and ruler.

drunk and engaged to the king's niece. Although Partonope's mother is unsuccessful on this occasion, she does convince the hero, during his next visit to Blois, to return to Chef d'Oire with a magic lantern by which he will be able to see his lover for the first time. Partonope's use of the lantern, and consequent betrayal of Melior, destroys her powers of enchantment so that he will no longer be invisible to the other inhabitants of Chef d'Oire, or vice-versa. Melior demands that he leaves her country and so a grief-stricken Partonope returns to Blois. After months of suffering, he seeks death in the forest of Ardennes but is found, by chance, by Melior's sister, Urake, who helps him to recover his strength and spirits by pretending that her sister has forgiven him.

Melior's nobles then announce a tournament whose victor will win their lady in marriage. Despite being imprisoned by Armant shortly before the tournament, Partonope manages to reach Chef d'Oire in time and, joining forces with a Spanish knight, Gaudin, proves himself one of the best knights. The judges finally award Partonope the prize over his closest rival, a heathen Sultan, on account of his superior beauty. Melior has, by this time, forgiven Partonope and the romance concludes with their marriage.

Narrative Structure in *Le Bel Inconnu* and *Partonope of Blois*: Geography and Timescale

It can be seen from the plot outlines above that both romances follow fairly traditional patterns. *Le Bel Inconnu* is a quest narrative, the goal of which is specified early in the tale, while *Partonope* appears, at least initially, to be a fairy-mistress romance. The familiarity of romance story motifs, combined with conventional settings such as the garden, the forest and castle, accounts for much of the appeal of the romance genre.[457] There are, nonetheless, many instances in which medieval authors are self-conscious about the structures within which they are working and seek to play with

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[457] Helen Cooper, for example, claims that 'Bunyan realised that a good story composed of motifs that are already familiar is the most mind-engaging form that there is, and that romances are the very best such stories'; *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 4.

audience expectations. Numerous critics have recognised such an attitude in Renaut de Bâgé's work and, as Simons notes,

> Current criticism of *Le Bel Inconnu* has centred around Renaut de Bâgé's self-reflective and ultimately subversive play with the conventional elements of medieval narrative codes.[458]

Le Bel Inconnu is a text full of borrowings (from the romances of Chrétien de Troyes and elsewhere) and also repetition within itself.[459] Dubost recognises in Renaut's technique a common medieval method of composition and he judges the results accordingly:

> Renaut emprunte, Renaut vole, Renaut pille! Sans doubte, mais il le fait avec l'innocence propre à l'âge de l'intertextualité, avec le naturel de celui qui puiserait dans un lexique commun pour dire tout autre chose que ses devanciers.[460]

It is certainly true that Renaut freely uses stock material, without any modern notions of plagiarism, but in my view he is certainly not 'innocent' or naive, inasmuch as he fully understands the wider potential of romance settings and uses them to unusual effect.

In addition to the conventional loci (such as court, forest and castle) that underpin the tale, he introduces a series of towns and cities. These more unusual urban settings fit easily into the geography of his chivalric tale, but are also somewhat problematic because they complicate the hero's straightforward quest by becoming places of importance in their own right. Ile d'Or in particular cannot just be passed by like the other staging posts on the hero's journey, but calls into question the location of the hero's true goal and entices him to retrace his steps at the moment when a more conventional romance would simply have ended. Renaut anticipates and deliberately frustrates his audience's expectations with this doubling-back and rejection of the clear-cut conclusion.

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[458] Penny Simons, 'The Squire, the Dwarf and the Damsel in Distress: Minor Characters in *Le Bel Inconnu*?', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 32 (1996), 27-36 (p. 27). As representative of this critical trend, see Jeri S. Guthrie, 'The *Jeu* in *Le Bel Inconnu*: Auto-Referentiality and Pseudo-Autobiography', *The Romanic Review*, 75 (1984), 147-61.

[459] For further discussion of borrowings in *Le Bel Inconnu*, see pp. x-xi of the introduction to Williams's edition and pp. xv-xviii in the Fresco and Donagher edition.

[460] Francis Dubost, '*Tel cuide bien faire qui faut*: le "beau jeu" de Renaut avec le merveilleux', in *Le Chevalier et la merveille dans 'Le Bel Inconnu' ou le beau jeu de Renaut*, ed. by Jean Dufournet (Paris: Champion, 1996), pp. 23-56 (p. 56).

Partonope of Blois is an equally clever and self-reflective text, assuming a knowledge of certain romance stereotypes on the part of the reader that it repeatedly exploits to great effect. Structurally, however, it is quite different and more pared down in terms of its range of settings. Partonope's home of Blois anchors the romance in geographical reality. The rest of the romance's geography is presented with deliberate ambiguity, to give the impression, at least initially, that Partonope's apparently magical self-propelling ship takes him to a fairy world. Blois stands in contrast to the fantastic nature of Chef d'Oire with its enchantress-ruler, even though we subsequently learn that Chef d'Oire is part of Byzantium and therefore exotic but not otherworldly.[461] Blois remains a more mundane counterbalance; it serves as the starting-point for the hero and is a place to which he returns upon three occasions. On the first of these return visits, he finds the French king much in need of his assistance in a war against Saracen aggressors. This situation allows Partonope his first opportunity to prove himself an exceptional knight and to win great acclaim from the French nobility. It is very common for a romance hero to show his exceptional abilities for the first time on the battlefield, and Blois and its environs provide a conventional romance space in which this can take place. The city of Chef d'Oire, by contrast, offers Partonope no such opportunities for chivalric action during the time he spends there with Melior.

Unlike Guinglain of *Le Bel Inconnu*, who volunteers for his quest, Partonope's adventures are set in motion by the woman whom he will eventually marry. Melior uses enchantment in order to lure Partonope to her and he is, at least at first, a very passive hero who finds himself swept along by external forces. For a romance of around 12,000 lines, *Partonope of Blois* has a relatively uncomplicated plot, centred as it is around the hero's movement to and from Chef d'Oire. Critics such as Bruckner have remarked that it resembles a *lai* in the simplicity of its basic framework.[462] Newstead lists *Lanval*, *Graelent* and *Desiré* as the romance's closest analogues and has also noted its similarities to *Guingamor* (which similarly involves journeys in a magical

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[461] On the Byzantine character of Chef d'Oire, see Carole Bercovici-Huard, '*Partonopeus de Blois* et la couleur byzantine', in *Images et signes de l'orient dans l'occident médiéval* (*Sénéfiance*, 11) (Aix-en-Provence: Publications du CUER MA, 1982), pp. 177-96.

[462] Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, 'From Genealogy to Romance and Continuation in the Fabulous History of *Partonopeu de Blois*', *L'Esprit créateur*, 33:4 (1993), 27-39 (p.37).

ship).[463] It is interesting therefore that Le Goff makes a distinction between the presentation of cities in *lais* as contrasted with cities in other twelfth-century French courtly literature. According to him, cities have a far more modest role in *lais*: 'they appear as backdrops rather than as heroines.'[464] This is absolutely not the case in *Partonope of Blois*, in which, as I will argue, city and heroine (Chef d'Oire and Melior) are interdependent and inseparable. *Partonope* may have grown out of the *lai* tradition (or from a common source), but it has indeed outgrown that mode of storytelling.

In terms of geography, *Le Bel Inconnu* differs from *Partonope* most significantly in that it is set in the realm of King Arthur. Typically for a romance, the tale – although set in Britain – is not underpinned by real geography and, as Alain Labbé comments,

> la toponymie du roman est purement littéraire et flotte dans la plus large indétermination topographique, suffisamment classique elle aussi pour ne pas appeler de commentaire particulier.[465]

Guinglain's quest in *Le Bel Inconnu* has a clear aim (although later even this is deliberately made ambiguous by Renaut de Bâgé) of helping Esmerée in the Gaste Cité (Senaudon), and also a clear point of origin – the Arthurian court – to offset this goal. The court is an important point of reference in all Arthurian romance and knights always retain links with it:

> En effet, même si pour diverses raisons les liens du chevalier avec la cour se distendent, l'aventure garde toujours un sens par rapport aux valeurs et à l'organisation sociale que représente cette cour.[466]

Taking leave of the king is also a significant gesture since, as Chênerie suggests,

> en sollicitant l'accord du monarque de façon rituelle, le héros montre qu'il agit dans la légalité des institutions, qu'il est un délégué, et par conséquent qu'il reste dans la dépendance du roi... .[467]

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[463] Helaine Newstead, 'The Traditional Background of *Partonopeus de Blois*', *PMLA*, 61 (1946), 916-46.
[464] Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 161.
[465] Alain Labbé, 'Paysage urbain et représentation de l'architecture dans *Le Bel Inconnu*', *Littératures*, 35 (Autumn 1996), 5-23 (p. 8).
[466] Marie-Luce Chênerie, *Le Chevalier errant dans les romans Arthuriens en vers des XII^e et XIII^e siècles* (Geneva: Droz, 1986), p. 75.
[467] Chênerie, *Le Chevalier errant*, p. 115.

The Arthurian court plays a fundamental role in *Le Bel Inconnu*: it is Arthur himself who provides Guinglain with a name of sorts, 'Li Biaus Descouneüs' (l. 131), and grants him the adventure that Helie announces to the court.

Arthur's court crucially underpins the narrative, but in a behind-the-scenes fashion, and Labbé has remarked that what seems an initially surprising absence of the Arthurian court in the narrative is in fact a forceful presence:

> ... la cour est à la fois un non-lieu du récit et, si l'on ose dire, un plus que lieu, lointaine chambre d'enregistrement de la prouesse tenue pendant la majeure partie de l'oeuvre hors du champ de la narration, mais aussi espace référentiel majeur sans lequel les exploits de l'Inconnu n'existeraient qu'incomplètement et demeureraient en quelque sorte dépourvus de mémoire.[468]

The presence of Arthur's court is reiterated as each of l'Inconnu's victories is dedicated to Arthur and the spoils of his encounters, the vanquished knights or rescued ladies, are sent to pay tribute to the court. In addition to demonstrating that Guinglain feels bound to the court at all times wherever he may travel, the knights and ladies sent by him are an important means of keeping those at the court informed of his progress. Chênerie emphasises the significance of this when she points out that

> ... l'avantage de ces liens vivants que constituent les prisonniers n'est pas négligeable. Auteur et lecteur suivent le chevalier errant dans ses pérégrinations; pour la cour restée à un point fixe, ou même en quête du héros, il faut des preuves de ses exploits, des témoignages qu'il honore ses engagements.[469]

Furthermore, the knight-errant's sense of obligation to the Arthurian court can at times confer upon it an almost talismanic power. This is well illustrated in the Middle English adaptation of the Fair Unknown story, *Lybeaus Desconus*, when Elene (the equivalent to the Old French's Helie) must reawaken the hero's sense of duty and urge him to move forward again after a long period of inaction at Yle d'Or. Unlike Guinglain who spends just a few days at Ile d'Or, the English hero is bewitched into pausing in his quest for a whole year by la Dame d'Amore (who takes the place of la Pucele as Blances Mains). Elene appeals to Lybeaus in the following way, reminding him of the promise of service he effectively made to Arthur by undertaking his quest:

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[468] Labbé, 'Paysage urbain', p. 7.
[469] Chênerie, *Le Chevalier errant*, p. 128.

> Knyght, thou arte false in thi laye
> Ageynes Kynge Arthure!
> For the love of o woman
> That mekyll of sorcery canne
> Thow doste the grete dissehonour:
> My lady of Synadowne
> May longe lye in preson,
> And that is grete doloure![470]

This mention of Arthur's name has sufficient power to break the enchantment that has kept Lybeaus motionless for the previous twelve months.

In *Le Bel Inconnu*, Guinglain's delay at Ile d'Or is much shorter (a matter of a few days only) and there is no suggestion that la Pucele has bewitched him. Time is treated in an interesting manner by Renaut de Bâgé throughout the text, since it operates at different paces at particular stages of the narrative. Peter Haidu suggests a division of the romance into two sections, distinct in both temporal and spatial terms.[471] He categorises Part A as the adventures in which Guinglain proves his worth as a knight, up to and including the Sparrowhawk Challenge at Becleu. Part B then consists of Guinglain's movement between the two ladies, la Pucele as Blances Mains in Ile d'Or and Queen Esmerée of the Gaste Cité (Senaudon). Haidu analyses the way in which time functions in these two sections as follows:

> Because there is no development [in (B)] comparable to that of (A), the concept of time also changes. Linear, purposive and insistent in (A), it is open, hesitant and merely schematic in (B). Chronology continues, but the clock's ticking is no longer audible.[472]

The linear time frame of Part A relates to Guinglain's journeying; in this first part of the romance he follows a path that is quite literally straight forward. Only in Part B is there doubling back and confusion over where his actual goal might lie.

In my opinion, however, Guinglain does continue to make progress in the romance right up to the point at which he achieves his quest and lifts the enchantment from the Gaste Cité.[473] It is only after he has apparently succeeded in his ultimate goal

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[470] *Lybeaus* Desconus, ll. 1501-8 (Lambeth MS).
[471] Peter Haidu, 'Realism, Convention, Fictionality and the Theory of Genres in *Le Bel Inconnu*', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 12 (1972), 37-60.
[472] Haidu, 'Realism, Convention, Fictionality', p. 53.
[473] This is also the view of Philippe Walter, who sees a distinct change in the way in which time is portrayed before and after the disenchantment of the serpent: 'Figures du temps et formes du destin dans le *Bel Inconnu*', in *Le Chevalier et la merveille*, ed. by Dufournet, pp. 111-22 (pp. 116-19).

and earned the right to marry the rich heroine – a triumph that seems to signal the conclusion of the tale – that narrative time begins to stutter. The hero's indecision causes him to waver between two potential brides and he then traverses the landscape both forwards and backwards. Guerreau rightly points out the way in which the character of the narrative clearly changes after Guinglain's victory at the Gaste Cité:

> la belle linéarité jusqu'ici respectée disparaît, faisant place à un entremêlement de segments narratifs relatifs à la fée de l'Ile d'Or et à Blonde Esmerée; simultanément, le rythme de défilement du temps change totalement: les divers épisodes sont séparés par des temps beaucoup plus longs, allant de plusieurs jours à plusieurs semaines, aucune précision claire n'étant plus donnée.[474]

Consequently the two major sites of action of the later part of the romance, Ile d'Or and the Gaste Cité, develop a far greater significance than any of the other places through which Guinglain has passed, and narrative time pauses to linger on them. Each place is connected with one of the two most influential women of the tale, and Guinglain's dilemma and lack of resolve regarding the women is dramatically expressed by his physical movement and vacillation between the two realms.

The influence of time is felt once more, though, when it becomes clear that Guinglain must make a final decision, a commitment to one place or the other, to Esmerée or la Pucele. Arthur sets a date for a tournament, to be held in one month's time, in the hope that Guinglain will attend because of his love of feats of arms. Once there, the king wishes to give him to Esmerée in marriage, an action that would appear to be irreversible. Predictably enough, the hero is keen to attend when he learns of the proposed tournament, despite the warnings from his lover that he will lose her forever if he goes. La Pucele has furthermore cautioned him earlier:

> Des or mais serrons a repos
> Entre moi et vos sans grant plait,
> E saciés bien tot entresait
> Que, tant que croire me vaurois,
> Ne vaurés rien que vos n'aiois;
> Et quant mon consel ne croirés
> Ce saciés bien, lors me perdrés. (5010-6)
>
> [Henceforth we shall know peaceful days together,
> with no trouble between us.

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[474] Alain Guerreau, 'Renaud de Bâgé: *Le Bel Inconnu*. Structure symbolique et signification sociale', *Romania*, 103 (1982), 28-82 (pp. 55-6).

> And you may know beyond any doubt
> that, as long as you heed what I say,
> you shall have all you desire.
> But when you cease to listen to me,
> you may be certain that you will lose me.]

The fairy mistress typically places a taboo on her lover, which he subsequently breaks, resulting in the temporary or permanent loss of his lady.[475] It is clear that Guinglain will ignore la Pucele's advice and attend the tournament, thereby breaking her taboo, and so the period of time he has to spend with la Pucele begins to tick away. Ultimately, the hero has no time even to bid her goodbye, as he is magically transported from his bed to the middle of a forest during the night, a few hours before he was due to set out in the morning. Guinglain, it seems, has no further control over events as the deadline arrives and he is carried relentlessly forwards toward the tournament and marriage with Esmerée.

Time in *Partonope* also varies in its speed and insistence, and temporality plays an even more important role in structuring this romance. For the first part of the narrative, Chef d'Oire is temporally a very static space, deprived of its citizens and therefore lacking the appearance of human life being lived out within its walls. It is also made to appear as an otherworldly place, and the audience may wonder whether it has a different form of time from the real world of Blois. In the Old French *Partonopeus* the initial period of time during which Partonopeus lives at Chef d'Oire provides a necessary suspension of action as Melior waits for the thirteen-year-old hero to mature (although 'mature' is perhaps a misleading term as what is awaited is merely his ageing and there are no signs that his character actually develops during this period). The Middle English Partonope is already eighteen, however, and so this term of stasis is not a time set aside for him to reach manhood but rather constrains him to a life of knightly inaction, in which he has no opportunity for personal (and particularly chivalric) development.

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[475] Cf., for example, Marie de France's *Lanval*, in which the hero is forbidden to speak of his fairy lover to anyone; in Marie de France, *Lais*, ed. by Alfred Ewert and Glyn S. Burgess (London: Bristol Classical, 1995), ll. 143-52.

Partonope's behaviour is limited by his surroundings which have, of course, been specifically adapted for him by Melior. As Hanawalt and Kobialka assert, 'space could influence the behavior of those who occupied it; defining space tended to prescribe the behavior within it'.[476] Melior's extreme way of 'defining' space, by casting a spell over it so that all the inhabitants are invisible to Partonope and vice-versa, creates an unsustainable environment for the young hero. Before he breaks her spell by using the magic lantern, Partonope does for a long time act in accordance with his lover's intentions. This means that by day his only possible distractions are hunting with dogs or birds. Similarly by night his relationship with Melior, consummated so early, cannot develop as – according to her rules – there is no hope of marriage (or of even seeing her) until the two and a half years have passed.

During this first part of the tale, Chef d'Oire exists in a time vacuum, a fact that is underlined when Partonope breaks Melior's taboo by trying to see her with the magic lantern and has to leave by the ship in which he arrived and in the exact state in which he first landed there:

> Alle hys cloþes to hym she fette,
> Soche cloþes as he thyder broghte,
> Were they owghte, were they noghte,
> The fryste tyme he thyder come.
> The huntynge cloþes to hym he nome,
> And dyd hem onne wyth sory chere. (6350-5)
>
> ---
>
> Forthe-wyth was broghte hym hys hakeneye,
> Neyther better ne worse, but in þe same a-Raye
> As he hym fryste broȝte frome the foreste. (6401-4)

Time has not moved on at all in Chef d'Oire, it appears, although meanwhile back in Blois there have been great changes, including the deaths of Partonope's father and the king of France.[477]

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[476] *Medieval Practices of Space*, ed. by Barbara A. Hanawalt and Michal Kobialka (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. x.

[477] Newstead suggests that there is a hint of the supernatural lapse of time frequently found in the *lai* here: 'Just as the fay in *Guingamor* announces to the hero that his uncle the king and all his friends and relatives are dead, so Melior announces to Partonopeus the death of his uncle the king and his father, despite his short absence from home and their apparent good health at the time of his departure' ('The Traditional Background of *Partonopeus*', p. 921).

Partonope's expulsion from Chef d'Oire in fact enables him to move forward, something that seems to have been impossible in the frozen timescape of Melior's city. Time noticeably moves on now, and this is dramatically illustrated by the deterioration of Partonope's physical state as he grows weak and nearly unrecognisable through his prolonged grief and suffering. Deadlines appear on the narrative's horizon as Melior's nobles arrange the tournament that will serve to find her a husband, and it is imperative that Partonope should be able to participate there on the allotted date. His imprisonment at Tenedon by Armant comes at a particularly crucial moment, almost preventing the hero from being able to assert himself in the field and win back his lady. Partonope's rehabilitation occupies quite a lengthy period of time and is physically enacted as he moves back towards Chef d'Oire in stages. This is, naturally, a painful, penitential process and Partonope laments his situation by comparing himself unfavourably with Adam:

> Adame loste paradyse þorowe hys folye,
> Butte yette a gretter losse haue I.
> For when þe angelle droffe hym owte,
> Thys ys the sothe wyth-owte dowte,
> He toke wyth hym hys loue, his wyffe;
> In Ioye they ledde forthe ther lyffe. (6471-6)

Partonope has not only been effectively banished from the physical place, but that place also absolutely embodies his lady, Melior. The loss of paradise, moreover, is an appropriate image in that it represents the moment when humanity, according to the Bible, entered a new dimension of time, measured in terms of human lifespan. While in paradise, the passing of time can have been of little relevance to Adam and Eve, and it was only after they were expelled and confronted with the full implications of their new-found mortality that time took on a real significance, as it was suddenly limited and constantly ebbing away. The moment of loss represents simultaneously a new relationship to time – which from this moment on becomes mutable and limiting.

Following his departure from Chef d'Oire, Partonope is forced to make his own way in the world, taking at least some initiative, rather than remaining motionless in the cocoon of Melior's world. It is only when he is free from the city that Partonope makes

progress towards achieving the woman he loves, and in a way that is more appropriate to a romance hero, through his individual prowess.

Viewing the City

Turning from this overview of the narrative structure of both romances, I now wish to focus more specifically on the roles of the various towns and cities and the ways in which they fit within their respective narrative frameworks. Of particular interest is the method by which the principal cities of the two romances are mediated to both the hero and the reader. Both Senaudon and Chef d'Oire are instantly remarkable since they are deserted because of enchantment, albeit two very different types of enchantment.[478] In both cases, there is an eerie absence of human life within the city walls and in this regard they might be called 'anti-cities'. While Senaudon's unnatural state is evidently caused by evil sorcerers, there is only a (misleading) implication in *Partonope* that Chef d'Oire's empty state is due to black magic. Chef d'Oire is presented in a deliberately misleading way so that the reader is manipulated and mis-directed as much as the hero.

Melior's kingdom repeatedly surprises Partonope: he expects to see people wherever he goes but is continually disappointed and made more fearful. From the moment of first finding himself at sea on board a ship that is apparently sailing itself, Partonope understandably suspects magic or devilish powers to be at work. Indeed, there are many suggestions that magic is inevitably the work of the devil and he experiences a great deal of apprehension during his first few hours at Chef d'Oire. Christine Boyer's analysis of the way in which a viewer interprets and relates to a cityscape is informative here and sheds some light on the perception of the fictional city that is mediated to the romance's audience:

> Composed city scenes are designed to be looked at and the spectator's amazement and memory evoked by their figural images. As spectators, we travel through the city observing its architecture and constructed

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[478] On the literary motif of the deserted castle, see Edina Bozóky, 'Roman médiéval et conte populaire: le château désert', *Ethnologie français*, n.s. 4 (1974), 349-56.

> spaces, shifting contemporary scenes and reflections from the past until they thicken into a personalized vision.[479]

An image of Chef d'Oire is first transmitted to us via the wary gaze of Partonope as he passes through its gates. Its layers of human activity and production are obscured by Melior's enchantments and only a partial view is therefore available to both hero and reader. Furthermore, Partonope's personal reactions influence the perception of the scene that the author allows us, so that the 'personalized vision' of the town that we receive is ostensibly that of Partonope (and therefore potentially biased and misleading). Behind Partonope is of course the author, and to complicate the matter further the persona of the narrator / translator, but we are largely allied with the hero, at least at first, experiencing each new and amazing feature of the cityscape simultaneously with him.[480]

Partonope is what Bal has termed a 'character-bound focalizor' and as such he brings about bias and limitation: '... the image we receive of the object is determined by the focalizor. Conversely, the image a focalizor presents of an object says something about the focalizor itself.'[481] Partonope is an unreliable viewer, confused by what appears to be a familiar kind of space and yet is utterly deserted and consequently alien to him. He is prone to speedy shifts in reaction to the place, as when he first lands at the harbour:

> When he to þe londe come was,
> He thonked Gode tho of hys grace,
> That alle thes perellys he had welle paste.
> Butte yette fulle sore was he a-gaste,
> For he sawe no-þynge that [bare] lyffe,
> Man ne chylde, wydo ne wyffe. (854-9)

Partonope's initial relief quickly turns to increased apprehension. He continues to fear the worst regarding the other marvellous characteristics of the place, such as the strange lighting of Chef d'Oire that demonstrates its independence even from the basic laws of nature:

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[479] M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory. Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (London: MIT Press, 1994), p. 32.
[480] See Mieke Bal, *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, trans. by Christine van Boheemen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), who argues that 'the agent that sees must be given a status other than that of the agent that narrates' (p. 101).
[481] Bal, *Narratology*, pp. 104-6.

Thys grette meruayle he can be-holde;
Hys herte be-gan faste to colde.
He sayde: 'Allas, what may þys be?'
He thoȝte he was but in fayre,
And weneth hyt were þe develles werke.
For well he wyste þe nyghte ys derke,
And nyghte hyt was vppon þe see;
On londe hyt was so lyghte þat he
Myghte se to ryde alle a-bowte
In alle the cuntre, thys ys no dowte. (884-93)

Again, later on, even after having met Melior, Partonope still has his suspicions as the romance plays with devilish allusions. He is brought a fine black horse the day after his arrival, but is initially afraid to ride it because of the sinister associations of its colour (ll. 2006-8).

All the potentially disquieting aspects of Chef d'Oire do prove ultimately to be innocuous, but it is unsurprising that Partonope's mother misjudges the signs and is consequently so opposed to his relationship with the mistress of Chef d'Oire. Ironically, she gains her false impression of the evil nature of the place through Partonope's own description: it is his perception and initial misinterpretations of the country that are passed back to France. By logical implication, Melior, governor of this realm, appears most likely to be a devilish sorceress. Melior's own artifice therefore backfires on her: although she protects her hedonistic dream of keeping Partonope secretly to herself from her own people, she has no control over the image that Partonope unwittingly gives to his people when he returns to Blois. When he goes back to France he steps outside her sphere of influence, passing the boundary that marks the outer limit of the area controlled by her spell, a spell which has much to do with perception and how (or whether) people see one another.

Once Partonope breaks that spell by gazing upon Melior, he is confronted with the unmistakable reality of the situation: that Melior is indeed a mortal (and God-fearing) woman whom he was wrongly persuaded into mistrusting.[482] When Partonope transgresses against his lover's taboo, Chef d'Oire's inhabitants immediately become visible and its more mundane and complete image, comprising the mass of citizenry

[482] Ferrante suggests that 'both lovers are misled, by a concern with surface appearance, to see with the world's eyes rather than with the deeper vision of love': *Woman as Image*, p. 86.

who create and maintain its wealth through trading, is unveiled.[483] As Partonope leaves with Melior's sister, Urake, the menacing crowds are a forceful presence:

> When he in-to the halle come,
> Off knyghtes and Squyers mony onne,
> Lokedde vppon hym fulle deynowsly,
> And manacyde hym full dyspytuosly. (6375-8)

It is only the fact that he is accompanied by Urake that protects Partonope from attack, but even she has grave fears for his safety 'tylle he was passed alle the rowte' (l. 6388). Chef d'Oire may still be an exceptionally rich and beautiful medieval city, but all that Partonope can see of it now is the threatening crowds, who have been antagonised by the revelation of his illicit relationship with their ruler, Melior. Far from standing in antithesis to the realms of Blois and France, as seemed to be the case earlier in the narrative, it transpires that Chef d'Oire is not an 'otherworld' after all and is founded on the same basic values as the country in which Partonope was raised.

Partonope of Blois is quite simply modelled, with just one main city and one main protagonist through whose eyes we see it. *Le Bel Inconnu*, by contrast, has a proliferation of cityscapes and its hero rarely travels alone but is accompanied by his guide, Helie, a dwarf and a squire. Helie is familiar with the terrain and often gives Guinglain information or warnings about places as they approach. The hero is never bewildered and left to draw his own conclusions like Partonope. Guinglain also meets other characters along his route, who provide him with further details about places he is about to encounter. Margerie is one such example: she tells the hero of the recent death of her lover at the hands of the lord of Becleu when they competed in the Sparrowhawk Challenge and explains the custom to Guinglain.[484] The hero then proceeds into the town, knowing exactly what to expect, and successfully undertakes the challenge.

The only time that Guinglain must advance alone is when he finally reaches his goal, the Gaste Cité. He parts from his companions outside its walls and is told by

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[483] To a large extent, the crowd that suddenly appears comprises the chivalric class of people who would have inhabited the castle. A broader cross-section of townsfolk, however, is indicated by later references to sailors and merchants (ll. 6393-400 and 8037-62).
[484] See ll. 1555-1628.

Lampart that he must proceed on his own. Even then, however, Lampart gives the hero detailed directions, telling him that he must enter a hall with a thousand windows, curse the jongleurs who stand in each aperture, and then await his fate in the middle of the hall.[485] It is clear that Guinglain must submit to his adventure there, in a manner characteristic of the romance knight, whatever form it may take. Although the ultimate test remains a mystery until Guinglain undertakes it in the hall, he is prepared to face something marvellous, unlike Partonope who cannot even tell whether the cityscape he encounters is the work of the devil or simply another fine romance kingdom.

Even were Guinglain not kept informed by his companions, the structure of *Le Bel Inconnu* would serve to prepare him gradually for the challenges he must face. Renaut de Bâgé repeatedly uses techniques of foreshadowing and mirroring, and Senaudon gains more significance in the light of the cumulative effect of the previous settings through which the hero has passed. Guinglain makes steady progress to his goal and travels through a set of places that are carefully inter-related. Partonope, on the other hand, is transported to Chef d'Oire by a mysterious ship, so that he has very little idea of its geographical location. Indeed, for at least part of the voyage he is asleep and thus has no sense of his bearings; he could easily have unwittingly crossed a boundary into an otherworld, particularly as such boundaries are traditionally marked by water.[486] Chef d'Oire stands very much alone, only later becoming geographically anchored when named as part of exotic, far-off Byzantium, and remains dislocated from the other, historically real, places of the romance.

Although Senaudon dominates the landscape of *Le Bel Inconnu*, it is supported (and at times anticipated) by a series of distinct places, each of which confronts Guinglain with a test that bears no apparent relation to his avowed quest, the rescue of Esmerée. The hero's meandering route towards the Gaste Cité does provide the young

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[485] See ll. 2801-38. On the topos of the palace with a thousand windows, see Michel Stanesco, 'Une architecture féerique: le palais aux cent/mille fenêtres', *Travaux de litterature*, 12 (1999), 237-54; also relevant is Alain Labbé, 'Vertiges de la spatialité et écriture romanesque dans le *Bel Inconnu*: la *Cité Gaste* et la "salle aux jongleurs"', *Champs du signe*, 6 (1997), 11-30.

[486] Colleen P. Donagher remarks upon the resemblance between the manner of the hero's arrival at Chef d'Oire and the passage to the other world in the *lais* of *Graelent* and *Guingamor* and also in many Celtic stories: 'Socializing the Sorceress: the Fairy Mistress in *Lanval*, *Le Bel Inconnu* and *Partonopeu de Blois*', *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 4 (1987), 69-90 (p. 73).

hero with time to prove himself through victories over successively more formidable opponents, but if that were its only purpose the author would seem to be labouring the point.[487] Except perhaps for the brief period during which Guinglain is distracted by his love for la Pucele at Ile d'Or, Senaudon constantly looms in the background of the romance. Its forceful presence is, ironically, largely due to the very lack of description of the city and its resulting enigmatic character. For a long time, we have no view of the city whatsoever, although it is mentioned frequently.

When Helie first introduces the adventure to Arthur's court, her message is brief and provides few hints of what can be expected by the knight who volunteers to help her mistress:

> La fille au roi Gringras te mande
> Salus, si te prie et demande
> Secors, qu'ele en a grant mestier. (177-9)
>
> [The daughter of King Guingras sends you
> her greetings and most heartily requests
> your aid, for she has great need of it.]

Helie also mentions that the knight must undertake 'le Fier Baissier' (l. 192), an allusion that only serves to heighten the mystery. Senaudon remains a vague, distant place for much of the romance. It is a city known to us only as the goal of Guinglain's quest and a considerable period of time passes before we even learn its name. As Vitz points out in relation to the naming of, or lack of names for, characters in the *lais* of Marie de France, the absence of a name for the city disorientates the reader (and hero) and complicates interpretation of the place.[488]

Initially, Senaudon is introduced merely as the home (and latterly the prison) of Helie's queen, Esmerée, the daughter of the dead king Guingras. As the narrative progresses, Senaudon is referred to ominously as 'le Gaste Cité' and it is only after Guinglain has achieved the Fearsome Kiss that Esmerée clarifies the tale's geography,

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[487] Even the initially critical Helie is sufficiently convinced after just the first two battles in the narrative to apologise to l'Inconnu for her earlier scepticism over his abilities (ll. 842-4).

[488] Evelyn Birge Vitz, *Medieval Narrative and Modern Narratology: Subjects and Objects of Desire* (London: New York University Press, 1989), p. 158.

both for Guinglain and the reader, by naming her kingdom and its chief city for the first time:[489]

> Gales a non ceste contree
> Dont je sui roïne clamee,
> Et ceste vile par droit non
> Est apielee Senaudon;
> Por ço que Mabons l'a gastee
> Est Gaste Cités apielee. (3385-90)
>
> [Wales is the name of this land,
> whose acknowledged queen I am,
> and this city is rightfully called
> by the name of Senaudon;
> because Mabon laid it waste,
> it has come to be called the Desolate City.]

Senaudon nonetheless dominates the romance, even as (or perhaps especially because it is) an anonymous space with the vaguest of outlines, providing the hero – and consequently also the narrative itself – with direction. The lack of definition of the Gaste Cité space empowers the imagination of the reader and heightens anticipation of the unexplained events that will unfold within it.

The construction of Senaudon as *the* destination, and ultimate aim of the quest, evidently marginalises other places encountered along the way, so that they appear at first glance as diversions only. Helie, in her role as companion and guide to Guinglain, reasserts this by emphasising the importance of Senaudon as goal at the expense of any other sites passed on the journey. She repeatedly tries to dissuade Guinglain from engaging in unnecessary combat in order that he might instead concentrate all his efforts on helping her mistress. On one such occasion, as Guinglain prepares to leave the path to rescue Clarie, a damsel abducted by giants, Helie vainly attempts to warn him off:

> ... Quiers tu dont aventures?
> En ton cemin en a de dures.
> Ja de ço ne t'estuet penser
> Ne fors de ton cemin aler;
> Car, ains que ma dame trovois,
> Cui je que vos tant en arois
> Trové que vos plus n'en vaurïés,

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[489] Senaudon has been identified by some scholars as Segontium, an old Roman town at the foot of Snowdon in Wales. For further information, see Roger Sherman Loomis, *Wales and the Arthurian Legend* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1956), pp. 1-18. Loomis also makes the somewhat dubious claim that Renaut's use of Senaudon as his 'Gaste Cité' proves that he had authentic information about the ruinous and deserted state of Segontium by the twelfth century (p. 12); it seems more likely that Renaut was influenced by Chrétien de Troyes's 'Gaste' Forest in *Le Conte du Graal*.

Ne vos plus soufrir n'en porïés.
Molt vos converra a soufrir,
Se Dius de mort vos veut garir,
Plus que chevalier qui soit nés. (659-69)

[... Is it adventures that you want, then?
You will find some difficult ones on the path you are travelling.
You should not be concerned about this voice,
nor stray from your path;
for, before you reach my lady,
I think you will have
found as many adventures as you desire,
and all that you can manage.
You will be forced to suffer a great deal,
more than any knight yet born,
even if God chooses to preserve your life.]

Helie tries to draw a distinction between the suffering destined for Guinglain because he has agreed to the challenge of rescuing her mistress, and the incidental (and dangerous) tests of his prowess that he takes upon himself and which involve a wandering away from the direct path to his sworn goal. Such incidents, however, not only prove Guinglain's outstanding character but also play an interesting supporting role to later events.

In the case of the episode with the two giants, for instance, Guinglain is initially prompted to intervene in the situation to prevent the rape of Clarie, but his killing of the giants proves to have a wider benefit. The devilish pair have tyrannously laid claim to local lands, which are freed thanks to the giants' deaths at Guinglain's hands. Helie reveals the extent of the giants' domination and desolation of this area of country and, in so doing, explains why there were no lodgings to be found on this stretch of their journey:

Il ont tot cest païs gasté;
Por ce avons jeü el pré
Qu'environs nos d'une jornee
N'a maisson n'aient devoree;
Tot ont destruit, la gent ocise;
Tote ont la terre a lor devise. (735-40)

[They have laid waste this entire land.
This is why we stopped in the meadow for the night,
for there is no dwelling within a day's journey
that they have not plundered.
They have destroyed everything and killed the inhabitants;
all the surrounding country is now in their control.]

The wasting of this land clearly foreshadows the wrecked state of Senaudon, which l'Inconnu will also restore. His gigantic opponents here, like the enchanters of the Gaste Cité, are unambiguously evil, a fact that is easily read in the damaged landscape that surrounds them.[490] The giants dominate the surrounding country by emptying it of inhabitants and civilisation. Mabon, the chief enchanter, similarly stamps his mark of authority on Senaudon only by voiding it of all citizens and transforming it into a deserted city.

Throughout the romance, the way in which Renaut de Bâgé presents the various settings faintly presages future events. Becleu, with its Sparrowhawk Challenge, is the first town that the hero comes across. There he finds that the deluded lord, Giflet, has made a mockery of the principle of the challenge, intended to celebrate female beauty, by setting up his ugly lover (the ironically named Rose Espanie) as a paragon of beauty. Previously he has successfully overcome in battle, and killed, all those who have attempted to contradict him by producing a more beautiful lady. Giflet's delusion over Rose Espanie's beauty is incomprehensible to all the bystanders, who conclude that love has 'bewitched' him:

N'i a celui cui ne dessie
Qu'il le maintint por le plus bele.
Tot s'esmervellent cil et cele
K'Amors li fait son sens müer.
Mais nus hom ne se puet garder
K'Amors nel face bestorner;
La laide fait biele sanbler,
Tant set de guille et d'encanter. (1728-35)

[Without exception all were displeased
that he maintained her to be the most beautiful of women.
Everyone, both men and women, wondered
how Love could so disturb his judgement.
But no man can so protect himself
that Love cannot turn his mind topsy-turvy,
for Love makes the ugliest woman seem a beauty,
so skilled are her ways of deceit and enchantment.]

Giflet cannot see that Rose Espanie is 'laide' and 'frencie' (l. 1727), and Guinglain must break this illusion in order to restore reason and true judgement. Although the

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[490] On the subject of giants, see Cohen, who remarks in his *Of Giants* that '*all* giants at their base are human representatives, despite their haunting alterity; from this admixture springs their power. Giants arise from human populations, the offspring of demonic couplings with women; or they are monsterized Saracens, who for all their disturbing distortions were recognized as essentially human' (p. 78).

reference to enchantment here is metaphorical, the episode nonetheless hints at later events in the narrative, when Guinglain will face far more formidable and 'real' enchantment at the Gaste Cité.

The last place, however, through which Guinglain passes before he finally reaches his destination is notable not for its foreshadowing of Senaudon but for the striking contrast it makes with the Gaste Cité. The town of Galigans belongs to the realm of Queen Esmerée and its ruler, Lampart, is her seneschal. It is evidently of lesser importance than Senaudon but still represents, on a smaller scale, an urban setting that would have been very similar to Senaudon before its magical transformation. The most striking element in Renaut's presentation of Galigans, which makes an obvious contrast with the Gaste Cité, is the prominence of its townsfolk. Lampart upholds an unusual local custom, in which he insists on doing combat with every potential guest of the town and, while a victorious knight will be offered suitable lodging, the vanquished are expelled from the town in a singularly shameful manner. Having been deprived of his horse, the defeated knight is made to walk back out of the town while citizens hurl various pieces of rubbish at him. This results in the unlikely textual juxtaposition of a beautiful romance city setting with such an earthy punishment: 'Cendres, boue, vieux pots et détritus: voilà tout un pan de la réalité médiévale la plus triviale qui surgit ainsi dans le texte où on l'attendrait le moins.'[491]

This tradition certainly gives Galigans a highly distinctive character of its own and brings the townsfolk to the forefront of attention. Lampart is evidently expected to win, as is illustrated by the reaction of the local people to Guinglain's entry:

Les jans qui en la vile sont,
Quant le virent, si vont riant;
Li uns le va l'autre mostrant.
Tuit s'atornent, les torces font,
Lor pos de cendres enplir vont
Et drapias mollier en ordures
Por faire au chevalier laidures.
Tot en parolent et consellent
Et de ferir tot s'aparellent,
Car il cuident de fi savoir
Qu'envers son signor n'ait pooir. (2570-80)

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[491] Labbé, 'Paysage urbain', p. 13. The episode may have been inspired by *Le Conte du Graal*, ll. 5905-6087, in which Gawain accepts hospitality from Guigambresil but finds himself besieged by the townsfolk once his identity is revealed.

[When the townspeople saw them,
they began to laugh
and point at the Fair Unknown.
All began to make ready: they prepared their mudpies,
filled their pots with ashes
and soaked their rags with filth
so that they might subject the knight to indignities.
They all spoke together and made plans,
preparing to strike,
for they were quite certain
that the knight would not prevail against their lord.]

The practice appears to provide a form of popular local entertainment as the disgracing of a defeated visitor brings citizens together and aligns their interests with the fortunes of their lord, Lampart. Thus in Galigans, the often-repeated departure of a defeated knight becomes a kind of procession watched, and participated in, by the whole town. The event operates along similar lines to the boisterous celebrations in medieval Brittany analysed by Leguay:

> Les fêtes sont, enfin, un des rares moments de la vie permettant d'abolir les contraintes, d'oublier un instant les valeurs établies, de donner libre cours à une certaine forme de contestation.[492]

At Galigans, the departure of a shamed knight triggers a communally-approved form of riotous behaviour, which shows support for Lampart's victories.

Despite the evident relish and wholehearted manner in which the townspeople interest themselves in Guinglain's contest with their lord, the joust itself takes place inside a huge hall from which the average citizen will necessarily be excluded. The venue is of great importance since, as Hanawalt and Reyerson argue:

> ... to medieval urban inhabitants, space was not neutral. Selection of particular spaces for events speaks to exclusion of some urban inhabitants as well as inclusion of others. Space creates social as well as literal boundaries. There is also the question of appropriate spaces for particular functions.[493]

Yet the citizens of Galigans are very involved in the ritual shaming of any knight who is defeated within the hall, and would evidently follow the progress of the joust with

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[492] Jean-Pierre Leguay, *Un réseau urbain au Moyen Âge: les villes du duché de Bretagne aux XIV^ème^ et XV^ème^ siècles* (Paris: Maloine, 1981), p. 343. Leguay gives examples of other forms of apparently subversive celebration, such as the post-Lenten tradition of throwing fishmongers (who would have been enriched by the privations of their customers during Lent) into the water.

[493] *City and Spectacle in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Barbara A. Hanawalt and Kathryn L. Reyerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. xviii.

interest. Although only the elite can actually witness first-hand the combat in the exclusive space of the hall, the whole population of the town is free to participate in the much wider communal reaction. Galigans is thus a place in which the citizens are exceptionally involved in the creation of the collective image of their town.

The joust between Lampart and Guinglain is particularly significant because it is the first occasion upon which l'Inconnu has not fought out in the open. The enclosed setting anticipates the site of his next, and most significant, encounter in the *Salle aux Jongleurs* of Senaudon. The similarities in the hall settings of Galigans and Senaudon serve, above all, to emphasise the major difference: the absence of people that sets Senaudon apart from all the other cities and towns of the romance and gives it an 'otherworldly' atmosphere. Guinglain enters Senaudon alone and finds its interior is eerily deserted except for the ethereal jongleurs of the great hall. The jongleurs further increase the anomaly of the situation since they are usually only to be found in company, their very purpose being to entertain the crowds – which are here conspicuous by their absence.[494]

The image of Senaudon transmitted to us in *Le Bel Inconnu* therefore is affected by its relationship with the various other places earlier in the narrative. We do not see through the hero's eyes, as in *Partonope*, but have a more steadily-built perception that comes from the cumulative interpretation of the series of earlier settings. Senaudon is obviously presented as the climax of the romance and does not disappoint; it is an extraordinary city and differs from the previous settings because it is the ultimate site of testing for the hero, but the nature of the test remains mysterious until the very last moment. Unlike *Partonope*, however, in which the hero enters the deserted Chef d'Oire and does not know what to make of the peculiar lack of inhabitants, it is made clear in *Le Bel Inconnu* that Senaudon is a city under attack (in the form of enchantment), and is consequently not in its normal state.

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[494] See Edmond Faral, *Les Jongleurs en France au moyen âge* (Paris: Champion, 1910), who defines jongleurs – a potentially very nebulous category that includes poets, musicians, acrobats, etc. – as 'tous ceux qui faisaient profession de divertir les hommes' (p. 2).

Women and the City

Guinglain's victory over the enchanters at Senaudon and his achievement of the Fearsome Kiss swiftly lifts the spell from the Gaste Cité and the place is re-transformed:

> Tost fu la cités restoree
> Et de bonne gent bien publee. (3659-60)
>
> [The city was quickly restored
> and filled with fine people once more.]

At the same time, the female ruler, Esmerée, also reassumes her human form, having been turned into a serpent by the enchanters in an effort to force her into marriage with Mabon. The assault on Senaudon was directed against both the city itself and its female figurehead, a phenomenon that is not uncommon in romance. Le Goff has famously likened the female body to the city in both *chansons de geste* and romances, saying of *La Prise d'Orange* for example that it 'is the story of the gratification of a double desire: to seize both a woman and a city. The one is as desirable as the other; indeed, the two desires coincide'.[495] This line of comparison can be further extended. The desirable woman is generally possessed of remarkable beauty and is richly attired; her external appearance is of great importance. The same is true of the typical romance city, which reveals at a glance its wealth and status. Furthermore, both women and cities are troubling for the questing knight, whose instinct leads him simultaneously to desire the rewards and renown that would come with possession (both sexual and territorial), but also to reject the commitment to either a lover or a kingdom that might hinder further acts of knightly prowess.

Even though Esmerée has been displaced in one sense, rendered powerless by the enchanters and deprived of all her subjects, she nonetheless remains synonymous with the city in her serpent form. The queen and Senaudon are inseparable, even though the physical form of each may be – and indeed has been – manipulated and mutilated. Close relationships between ruler and city were commonly fostered in the Middle Ages, when it was customary for a city's 'self-image' to be constructed and reiterated through ceremonial action which would reinforce the ties between ruler and citizens:

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[495] Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, p. 157.

> ...important junctions and public spaces were marked at special times of the year with stages and scaffolds holding aloft theatrical tableaux vivants.... Eventually transcribed in stone, a memory system of public monuments and places arose, rearticulating these communal covenants and rehearsing their sovereign pledges.[496]

It was less usual, however, for single women to be active heads of state, and so it is remarkable that they have such a forceful, and powerful, presence in both *Le Bel Inconnu* and *Partonope of Blois*. Their close association with their realms (Esmerée with Senaudon, la Pucele with Ile d'Or and Melior with Chef d'Oire) increases their stature and even helps to define their identities.

Partonope's Melior provides the best illustration of this shared identification of a woman with her city, since she is initially invisible and no physical image of her is available either to Partonope or to readers. From the beginning, Melior is inextricably linked with her surroundings: instead of the conventional portrait of female beauty that we might expect of the romance heroine, we have only the lengthy descriptions of the cityscape upon which to base an interpretation of her character. The physicality of the town counterbalances the invisibility of its ruler and, as Bermejo maintains,

> Bref, la ville exhibe une vocation féminine, car elle assume des fonctions propres de Mélior, tout au moins pendant la durée du sortilège et que sa corporéité ne se fait pas visible.[497]

Partonope's early misinterpretations of Chef d'Oire, and his suspicions of devilish influence, therefore reflect back onto Melior herself when he relates his experiences to his mother in Blois. Since the place seems so full of (possibly malignant) magic, it is only logical to assume that its unseen mistress is of a like character. Going further than Bermejo, however, I would argue that even once the spell is broken, Chef d'Oire and its ruler continue to develop in parallel together throughout the remainder of the romance and not merely while the city is enchanted and Melior invisible. Indeed, Melior is barely described even when her appearance is revealed by the magic lantern. All we are told is that its light reveals '... þe ffeyreste shape creature / That euer was formed

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[496] Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory*, p. 7.
[497] Esperanza Bermejo, 'Chef d'Oire dans *Partonopeus de Blois*: la ville comme espace de totalisation', *Mediaeval Studies*, 63 (2001), 223-44 (p. 231).

þorowe nature' (5864-5). Her true form is never made explicit, but always mediated through the city.

External appearances aside, both Melior and Chef d'Oire undergo a substantial shift in identity (which could perhaps be better described as a loss or suppression of their former identities). This is a direct consequence of the difficult nature of their initial shared image. Melior is not merely important to the story but actually responsible for initiating its action, by deliberately luring Partonope to her city; furthermore, she appears to have created a space that is independent from societal (and particularly male) control. The source of her power lies in her ability to manipulate space, and it is only by depriving her of this skill that a male-dominated status quo is reasserted and superimposed onto the romance. The apparently deserted Chef d'Oire clearly stands as a physical manifestation and tangible proof of the heroine's power. In order then to reduce the influence of the initially subversive and worryingly powerful Melior, and convert her into a more conventional romance heroine, ready to be claimed by the hero after a test of his fighting prowess, it is evidently also necessary to adapt the image of her city.

As the romance progresses, the heroine and her city are rewritten. The earlier impressions of Chef d'Oire, transmitted to us via the wary gaze of the newly-arrived Partonope, in which it was strongly suggested that the city was under (a possibly evil) enchantment, are forgotten as a new impression of the place is gradually built up and reinforced. This is achieved not by more external description of the city or heroine, but by foregrounding Melior's powerlessness and her sudden visibility. As Kay claims,

> So long as she was unseen, Melior ... can draw all those around her into magical invisibility alongside her; but once she is seen, and seen to have nothing magical about her, then her surroundings collapse back into everyday visibility, and her realm becomes just another kingdom like that of France.[498]

Melior becomes a figure in a tower, overlooking the field in which the three-day tournament is played out. From there she can be seen by all contenders, a living illustration of the prize for which all compete. Her position in the tower further

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[498] Sarah Kay, *Courtly Contradictions: the Emergence of the Literary Object in the Twelfth Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 283.

reinforces her connection with the city, the sovereignty of which will also fall to the victor of the tournament. Together, Melior and Chef d'Oire embody the reward offered to the competing knights but have no power whatsoever to influence the outcome.

Chef d'Oire recedes into the background, portrayed much less as a city in its own right than as a conventional backdrop for the three-day tournament, which necessarily takes place outside its walls.[499] A study of the terminology used in relation to Chef d'Oire highlights the dramatic way in which its presentation is changed during the course of the romance. In the earlier part of the tale (up to line 5826), Chef d'Oire is referred to as a *cyte* or *towne* no fewer than nineteen times. Interestingly, however, the last occasion upon which Chef d'Oire is denoted a *cyte* occurs at line 5826: less than halfway through *Partonope of Blois*. Subsequently it is described as a *towne* three times (ll. 8062, 8781 and 10082) and a *castell* three times (ll. 9388, 10837, 10843).[500]

Admittedly, there is often considerable slippage between the words for 'castle' and 'town' in medieval romance, with the former term being preferred even when what is meant is clearly more than just a castle. This is understandable, given that many medieval settlements would have their origins in a few houses clustered around a castle for the protection it offered, only later achieving the status of town or city in their own right. Van Emden has commented on Old French literature that 'in the Middle Ages, the word *chastel* was often applied to small fortified towns, also called *burc*, as well as to individual castles'.[501] His observation is soon borne out by an examination of the place words used by Chrétien de Troyes in his romances. While *cité*, *vile* and *borc* together are only employed upon 74 occasions, *chastel* appears 202 times and frequently denotes a town rather than a castle alone. The same is not true, however, of at least the first half of *Partonope of Blois*. Although the terms *cyte* and *towne* seem largely interchangeable, there is a clear distinction between these two terms and *castell*.

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[499] The city is barely mentioned during the tournament, which takes place just outside, on a 'medowe faire and playne' (l. 8090).

[500] All three instances of *castell* occur mid-line, and the choice of vocabulary is therefore not constrained by the rhyme.

[501] Wolfgang van Emden, 'The Castle in some Works of Medieval French Literature', in *The Medieval Castle. Romance and Reality*, ed. by Kathryn Reyerson and Faye Powe (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1984), pp. 1-26 (p. 2).

The castle is just one feature of the town of Chef d'Oire, a point that is made clear when its location is first described:

> A-myddes the towne, wyth-in the walle,
> There stode a castelle þat was ryalle. (842-3)

Repeatedly, the town/city is mentioned in the same line as the castle, reaffirming that they are distinct entities.[502]

The use of terminology later changes significantly, however, in line with the change in Chef d'Oire's image. By the conclusion of the text, there are few references to Chef d'Oire (even though it is the site of the climactic three-day tournament) and the words *castell* and *towne* become interchangeable, with the last three instances of *castell* having lost all specificity and referring merely to Chef d'Oire as a whole. No longer a clearly defined city space with a castle at its centre, Chef d'Oire has lessened in importance to such an extent that it no longer matters whether it is designated a town or a mere castle. Its character becomes dictated by Melior's lords, rather than the heroine herself. It is Ernoul, for example, who proposes the idea of a tournament and accompanying merchants' fair, describing at some length his plans for booths and tents to be pitched for the sale of chivalric goods so that Chef d'Oire 'shall seme a right wele fayre towne' (l. 8062). This inclusion of a merchants' fair, to be organised around the jousting, is quite unusual in romance, and serves to underline further the manner in which the three-day tournament seeks to involve, and benefit, the whole population of Chef d'Oire, in sharp contrast to the isolation felt by its ruler, Melior.[503]

Initially ignorant of Partonope's participation in the tournament, Melior remains unable to influence the judges even when she becomes aware of him. She acknowledges to herself the weakness of her position in the following lines:

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[502] See for example ll. 878, 2022, 2072, 2123.

[503] The inclusion of the fair in *Partonope* supports Putter's argument that, given the 'interplay and overlap between commercial and chivalric discourses in the romances of Chrétien and the *Gawain*-poet, it may be time to abandon the tenacious supposition that their romances sought to transport a threatened class of feudal knights into a realm of fairy, secure from the corrosive influences of efficient government and the growth of a profit economy'. See Ad Putter, *'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight' and French Arthurian Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 243. See also Guerreau, 'Structure symbolique', who argues along similar lines that 'Renaud de Bâgé contredit sans ambages les thèses des historiens selon qui la prise de conscience de la chevalerie au XII^{e} siècle se serait largement effectuée en opposition à la naissance de la bourgeoisie urbaine' (p. 73).

'For a woman þat paramour loveth,' quoth she,
'Moste kepe counseylle, leste she falle in blame,
Hir privey thoughtes for blemysshyng of hir name.
For þough she love a man with all hir myght,
Of whate estate he be, lorde, squyer, or knyght,
Of her governaunce so wise she moste be,
That no man espie þat she hath any deynte
More of hym þen of any oþer wight.
Thus moste she governe hir in mennes sight.' (10748-56)

Her words explain why she felt it was important to go to such lengths to remain invisible while pursuing her relationship with Partonope and why she kept him unseen from her lords and citizens.

The way in which a woman of status is perceived by the world is very important, and even a female ruler does not have much freedom in romance to act as she chooses without censure from those around her. Although the dual heroines of *Le Bel Inconnu* are a great deal more visible than Melior – and passages of conventional description are allotted to each of them – a significant amount of time does pass before we actually meet Esmerée. Like Melior, she is firmly associated with her city, and it is that city, in its now desolate state, that is described before her own physical appearance is revealed. The queen is mentioned from the beginning of the romance, but can only be seen once Guinglain has reached Senaudon and achieved his quest by lifting the enchantment from her and the Gaste Cité. When he first encounters Esmerée in the hall of the Gaste Cité, he is in fact unaware of her identity as she appears in her bewitched state as a serpent. Colby has discussed the overlap of the feminine and the monstrous in the Fearsome Kiss episode and it is notable that the serpent, though the perverted work of the enchanters, is not repellent enough in form to drive Guinglain away. Rather, he is held spellbound; as Colby argues, the serpent retains enough femininity and beauty to transfix him.[504] The city of Senaudon itself has a similar contradictory dual aspect: scarred as it may be by the maleficence of the enchanters, its buildings are still magnificent and it proves just as easy to restore to its former state.

The enchantment at the Gaste Cité is only skin-deep and, although there is evidently a dramatic change in its image (and that of its ruler, Esmerée), the

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[504] Alice M. Colby, 'The Lips of the Serpent in the *Bel Inconnu*' in *Homenaje a Robert A. Hall, Jr: ensayos lingüísticos y filológicos para su sexagésimo aniversario*, ed. by David Feldman (Madrid: Playor, 1977), pp. 111-15.

transformation effected by the hero merely reveals what was there all along. In *Partonope of Blois*, by contrast, Melior's entire character and that of her city are re-worked and substantially altered into something quite different by the conclusion of the tale. The other significant female character in *Le Bel Inconnu*, la Pucele as Blances Mains, actually bears a much closer resemblance to Melior than does Esmerée, even though the two powerful enchantresses are ultimately treated by their respective authors in quite dissimilar ways.

Both Melior and la Pucele augment their power as female rulers through the use of enchantment, and in both romances this necromancy has a discomfiting element to it.[505] It is interesting to note that both texts provide relatively early examples of a changing attitude to enchantment in literature. Westoby observes that

> The early *fée* offered a means of escape which, although not posited as an ideal solution, did nevertheless exist. By the time of *Claris et Laris*, in contrast, the knight is trying to escape from, not with, the *fée*.[506]

Ferrante also discusses the negative attitude to the enchantress apparent in many romances:

> The attribution to them of magic powers seems at times to be a manifestation of fear of women; as it is practiced in courtly literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, magic is both an intellectual power and a secret one. In the earlier romances women usually employ the magic to good ends but always to shape and control situations they cannot influence in any other way and not always successfully.[507]

This is particularly true of *Le Bel Inconnu*, which features the evil enchantments at the Gaste Cité in parallel with the more benignly magical realm of la Pucele. La Pucele is not explicitly disapproved of, but seems to be a disquieting element who does not really fit with the male chivalric ethos. Likewise in *Partonope*, Melior only finally achieves

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[505] La Pucele is also very closely identified with her city and, as Labbé writes, 'l'Île d'Or est aussi ville-femme et ville-fée, tacitement identifiée à sa suzeraine'; 'Paysage urbain', p. 15.

[506] Kathryn S. Westoby, 'A New Look at the Role of the *Fée* in Medieval French Arthurian Romances', in *The Spirit of the Court. Selected Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society (Toronto 1983)*, ed. by Glyn S. Burgess and Robert A. Taylor (Cambridge: Brewer, 1985), pp. 373-85 (p. 383). Westoby further adds that 'Under various influences, literary, social and moral, the *fée* has been transformed from a supernatural being shrouded in the dim mists of the Celtic otherworld to an evil temptress undermining the very foundations of the Arthurian world' (p. 385).

[507] Joan Ferrante, 'Public Postures and Private Maneuvers: Roles Medieval Women Play', in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (London: University of Georgia Press, 1988), pp. 213-29 (p. 218).

her goal of marriage with Partonope after having lost her magical powers and having thus been transformed into a far more conventional (and therefore more passive) romance heroine. As Fourrier rightly points out, however, this is illogical since she actually learnt her magic through study, rather than having supernatural ability, but the author is unconcerned with such details: 'il se débarrasse de la féerie dès qu'elle a rempli son rôle.'[508]

Melior and la Pucele are similarly portrayed in this rationalisation of their magical powers: the two romances both attribute the women's skills in enchantment to learning. Despite first appearances, Melior is *not* a fairy but has simply been well educated thanks to her position as the only heir of her father (an emperor), learning her necromancy through diligent study after she had also mastered the seven sciences, medicine, divinity and the seven arts (ll. 5912-37). La Pucele likewise explains her powers of enchantment by telling the hero that her wealthy father provided her with a good education, which again extended to necromancy after she had learnt more traditional subjects (ll. 4930-47).

As with Melior, it is la Pucele who has orchestrated events in her romance. We discover eventually that it was she who sent Helie to Arthur's court, expressly so that Guinglain might win renown by taking up the adventure. She too was the disembodied voice that spoke to the hero after he had achieved the Fearsome Kiss, to reveal his identity. It appears that, all along, Guinglain has been unwittingly influenced and directed by la Pucele, and Kelly contends that her role 'is analogous to Renaut's as author, narrator and lover because she, like Renaut, decides, and wishes to decide, which adventures her knight will encounter'.[509] Her most direct manipulation of Guinglain comes when she creates illusions for him in her great hall in order to humiliate him before the rest of the household and thereby punish him for his previous discourtesy in leaving so abruptly and without her permission. The illusions consist of a

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[508] Anthime Fourrier, *Le Courant réaliste dans le roman courtois en France au moyen-âge* (Paris: Nizet, 1960), p. 389.

[509] Douglas Kelly, 'Description and Narrative in Romance: the Contextual Coordinates of *Meraugis de Portlesguez* and the *Bel Inconnu*', in *Continuations: Essays on Medieval French Literature and Language in Honor of John L. Grigsby*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy and Gloria Torrini-Roblin (Birmingham, AL: Summa, 1989), pp. 83-93 (p. 88).

transformation of space. Upon his first attempt to reach the door to la Pucele's bedchamber, Guinglain suddenly finds himself on a narrow wooden plank over a raging river. When he almost falls into the river, and breaks the spell by crying out for help, he is discovered to be clinging to a hawk's perch. Having realised that it was all an illusion ('Que ço fu songes que je vi' – l. 4622), Guinglain tries again, only to feel that the arches of the hall are now pressing down on him and crushing him to death. When he finally calls for aid, he is found with his head under his pillow. After these humiliations, la Pucele finally allows Guinglain to come to her bedchamber and consummate their relationship.

Although enchantment is used here to humorous effect, this episode in the narrative comes shortly after Guinglain has overcome the far more devastating magic of Mabon at the Gaste Cité. The juxtaposition hints at unease over the extent of la Pucele's extraordinary powers, which threaten to eclipse – and could potentially destroy – even the best of knights like Guinglain. La Pucele's and Melior's mastery of space evidently confers great power on the two women, but in both romances their schemes fail. Both women – and also the enchanters of the Gaste Cité – are still obliged to act within romance conventions, and these conventions dictate that the knight-hero will be ultimately victorious.

Guinglain's experiences in the *Salle aux Jongleurs*, at the heart of the Gaste Cité, have been described as a 'very theatrical representation'[510] – aptly enough since this is the great climax and central stage of the romance. The theatricality of the scene also suggests its artificiality (contrived as it is by magical means), which alongside the rest of the disturbingly empty city increases the impression that Guinglain is now facing something very different from that which he has hitherto encountered. As the episode proceeds, however, it becomes clear that it is not so different at all from the standard fare of romance, as Guinglain simply pits his strength against two knights who (certainly ill-advisedly) do not use any supernatural powers directly against him. Guinglain is disorientated by the noise of the slamming shutters in the hall, so loud that

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[510] Joan Tasker Grimbert, 'Effects of *Clair-Obscur* in *Le Bel Inconnu*', in *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context*, ed. by Keith Busby and Erik Kooper (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamins, 1990), pp. 249-60 (p. 255).

it makes the walls shake, and the sudden alternations between light and complete darkness. At one point, he even loses his horse in the dark (ll. 2963-7), but the enchanters do not take advantage of this and fight the hero according to the usual chivalric rules. Thus, despite the implications of the supernatural power of his opponents, Guinglain is able to win through a strangely straightforward combat.

Renaut de Bâgé likewise suggests the magnitude of la Pucele's magical skill, while also showing her powers to have severe limitations. When, for example, she first appears in *Le Bel Inconnu*, la Pucele is bitterly regretting an earlier decision that all suitors for her hand should prove themselves worthy by attempting to defend the causeway before Ile d'Or for seven years. Only by surviving this long trial undefeated will a knight earn the right to marry her. Having imposed this custom herself, she is apparently powerless to alter it and prevent an unwanted marriage with Malgiers li Gris, a knight who has thus far proved himself a highly promising contender, having successfully killed all challengers to the causeway and impaled one hundred and forty-three heads on stakes in testimony to his achievement.[511] Clearly la Pucele has recently been repenting of her wisdom, finding herself in danger of being condemned by her own terms to marry Malgiers, whose bad character is roundly denounced by the narrator:

> Il estoit fel, cuvers et mals,
> Et trop tirans et desloiaus;
> Por che la dame le haoit. (2035-7)
>
> [He was cruel, base and wicked,
> a faithless scoundrel;
> this was why the lady hated him.]

Malgiers's presence and position before the city walls recall that of a besieging force. He does not pose an immediate threat but has only to wait until the seven years have passed in order to gain free admittance to the town and woman he covets. Placed just beyond the town, his is a space of exile and exclusion from the sophisticated and feminine comforts of the town proper. He occupies a hinterland that might have been

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[511] On the significance of the number of decapitated heads see Guerreau, 'Structure symbolique', p. 59: 'Cent quarante trois, c'est bien sûr douze fois douze moins un: il ne reste qu'un pieu libre, ce qui indique nettement que le combat qui est décrit ne peut être que le dernier.'

associated with outcasts such as lepers in a real medieval city, a place well suited to Malgiers's base, uncivilised character.[512] La Pucele's powers are severely restricted here to keeping Malgiers at a distance for a further two years, and it is only Guinglain's intervention that releases her permanently from an unwanted marriage.

It is with a profound sense of relief and wisdom gained from recent experience that la Pucele welcomes Guinglain into Ile d'Or immediately after l'Inconnu has overcome Malgiers and declares:

De la caucie aval garder
L'uissage vel cuite clamer.
Por vos, sire, cuites serra,
Que ja mais garde n'i ara.
Et si ferai de vos signor;
Ma terre vos doins et m'amor. (2269-74)

[I declare that the custom
of guarding the causeway is ended.
For your sake, my lord, it is now at an end;
never again will the causeway be guarded.
And further, I shall make you a powerful lord:
I give you my land and my love.]

The sudden abolition of the custom of the causeway marks la Pucele's admission of the error of her earlier ways, yet she does not cease in her attempts to control others. Despite Guinglain's apparent enthusiasm for marrying her, la Pucele still wishes to make sure of his acquiescence by summoning all her liege lords to celebrate the wedding at short notice and, if necessary, ensuring by a show of force that the groom does not change his mind.

In so doing, she displays behaviour similar to that of many other powerful women of medieval romance who have in common the possession of valuable lands and a knowledge of magical lore. La Pucele's consequent wish to control both those around her and the space in which they operate is a desire clearly shared by Melior in *Partonope of Blois*. The women also have in common a lack of mobility, however, and seem anchored to the cities with which their identities are intertwined. When Helie

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[512] See Christopher Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England 1066-1550* (London: Routledge, 1997): 'The importance of Jews and lepers within medieval society is that both groups were liminal to Christian society: socially and spiritually. The leper hospitals were placed on the outskirts of towns, marking the beginning of a "no-mans land" ... . Jews too were physically cut off from Christian society in death by their own graveyards beyond the confines of the town' (p. 205).

warns Guinglain of la Pucele's plans to trap him into marriage and persuades him to leave Ile d'Or at once, la Pucele does not attempt to pursue him or send people after him, but remains inseparable from her city.

It should perhaps come as no surprise that romance characters, such as la Pucele and Melior, often attempt to control others by moving or trapping them, as a woman's opportunities for travel are extremely restricted. The most important female characters in *Le Bel Inconnu* and *Partonope* are all attached to particular places, a feature characteristic of romance, and the only notable exception to this rule is Helie. As Edwards notes in her discussion of Malory's *Morte Darthur*, 'women who roam the landscape are not usually the object of the quest, but the means to the achievement of it'.[513] Helie functions as messenger and guide to Guinglain until he reaches the goal of the Gaste Cité when, having fulfilled her brief, she abruptly ceases to figure in the romance.

Helie is one of only a very select group of characters (both male and female) in *Le Bel Inconnu* with freedom of movement, which comes as a result of her relation to the hero and membership of his close entourage. Most of the other protagonists are stationary and attached to specific places. Since the goal of a romance knight is often marriage – and the attainment of lands through that union – women of high status, in particular, tend to be immobile and firmly allied with their desirable estates, as is the case with Esmerée and la Pucele as Blances Mains. Donnalee Dox, in her discussion of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, notes that there are 'demarcated spaces to signify each character'[514] and this is true not only of that drama but also of many medieval romances, including *Le Bel Inconnu*.

Hanawalt and Kobialka are among recent critics who have discussed the gender associations of space in medieval culture:

> The realization that people divided space by gender is becoming more apparent: women occupied rooms, houses, quarters in the cities and villages, while men's activities took them farther abroad to streets,

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[513] Edwards, 'The Place of Women', p. 38.

[514] Donnalee Dox, 'Theatrical Space, Mutable Space, and the Space of Imagination. Three Readings of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*', in *Medieval Practices of Space*, ed. by Hanawalt and Kobialka, pp. 167-98 (p. 175).

> highways, fields, cities, oceans, battles, and council tables. Space carried meanings.[515]

In *Le Bel Inconnu* and *Partonope*, however, it is women who are most closely associated with the council tables, a symbol of governance. There is, nonetheless, still a clear dichotomy evident: women rule in the most important cities while men perform on the battlefield, in tournaments or in the open countryside. The authors of both texts, though, appear uncomfortable with this division and seek to resolve their narratives into more male-dominated schemes.

Le Goff asserts that a man can live as a warrior in the city only if it 'no longer symbolizes a renunciation of the life of the military noble'.[516] Guinglain's continued wanderings are an avoidance of this renunciation, although he eventually finds that he can possess neither Esmerée nor la Pucele without making the sacrifice of settling down within urban surroundings. In *Partonope*, the hero is more fortunate as circumstances change so that he is finally able to marry Melior – and thereby inherit the city and kingdom – without compromising his sense of knighthood. Previously, Partonope had been denied the opportunity to interact with other people because of Melior's concealing magic, and thus he could not enter into an important part of chivalric life and try to win a good reputation amongst his peers. When he is finally approved by the male elite at Chef d'Oire as a suitable husband for their queen, public perception of the hero falls in line with Melior's original evaluation of his worthiness. There is a sense of social unity as the traditional hierarchy is observed, the disturbing memory of magic (and its rather rebellious female perpetrator) is erased and smoothed over and the city fades into the background to become merely another chivalric backdrop.

Conclusion

Partonope of Blois works out the problems in the narrative caused by the presence of Melior – disturbing to the chivalric world because she is not only a powerful female ruler but also an enchantress – by rewriting her character and that of her city. Chef d'Oire necessarily remains as a fitting background but, as is implied by

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[515] Hanawalt and Kobialka, *Medieval Practices of Space*, p. x.
[516] Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, p. 161.

that term, becomes much less important in its own right than at the start of the poem. Melior, in a remarkable exercise of authorial manipulation, is manoeuvred into a more conventional romance schema, by being brought back under male control and deprived of her magical powers. Without these skills, she is nothing more than a beautiful lady, the conventional romance portrait of the heroine. From her first appearance in *Partonope* as a subversive type of la Pucele figure, Melior is renegotiated into the romance frame so that, by the conclusion, she bears far more resemblance to Queen Esmerée instead.

Le Bel Inconnu, on the other hand, contains both these aspects of Melior's character – before and after her accommodation into the polite society of romance – but of course retains them both in the form of the dual heroines, la Pucele and Esmerée.[517] Renaut de Bâgé constantly multiplies conventional elements from the romance motif stockpile. In a more conservative romance, la Pucele would be forgotten and Guinglain would take his well-earned, rightful place as husband of Queen Esmerée and lord of Wales. Senaudon, the original goal, would thus mark the conclusion of the romance. It is interesting that this is indeed what happens in the later and much-simplified Middle English version of the story, *Lybeaus Desconus*. The English text does not share the sophistication of its Old French predecessor and *Lybeaus's* greatly reduced length (just over 2000 lines as opposed to the 6200 of *Le Bel Inconnu*) is indicative of how much it leaves out. Its more predictable structure retains much of the essence of the story it shares with *Le Bel Inconnu* but lacks most of the unusual and outstanding aspects of Renaut de Bâgé's narrative art.

Le Bel Inconnu is more captivating than *Lybeaus Desconus* because of its refusal to settle for the simple, expected ending. Guinglain returns to Ile d'Or, a place that has previously seemed at variance with knightly endeavour and is consequently outside the bounds of conventional society, and the story continues after the conclusion of the Fearsome Kiss. Both Guinglain and the narrative as a whole are drawn by the two

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[517] On the opposition between the two heroines, see Jeanne Lods, '"Le Baiser de la reine" et "le cri de la fée": étude structurale du *Bel Inconnu* de Renaut de Beaujeu', in *Mélanges de langue et litterature françaises du moyen-âge offerts à Pierre Jonin* (*Sénéfiance*, 7) (Aix-en-Provence: Publications du CUER MA, 1979), pp. 413-26.

opposing influences of the ladies of Senaudon and Ile d'Or. As the hero appears unable to make a firm choice or rejection of either one, the two strands of the plot are kept open and run in parallel. Although ultimately a resolution in favour of one or the other must be reached, for a long time the two places are played off against each other. Magic features strongly in both cities but, as Sturm suggests, with a significant difference in emphasis: 'of the two types of stories which appear in conjunction, one focuses on an enchantress, the other on an enchantment'.[518]

In addition to the two women themselves vying for Guinglain's affections, it is interesting to see that the depictions of their respective cities seem to set them in competition with each other in terms of grandeur and majesty.[519] As Labbé states, this leaves the reader in a state of uncertainty:

> L'art retors de Renaut de Beaujeu nous condamne, avec l'Inconnu, à ne le point savoir et à demeurer comme lui, entre deux femmes, entre deux villes, dans la rêveuse incertitude de l'ambiguïté.[520]

The two townscapes are designed to play with, and subvert, our assumptions. Renaut employs the same technique in relation to women in *Le Bel Inconnu*, introducing several beautiful women into his narrative as 'red herrings' so that the identity of the actual heroine is always in doubt. As Simons explains, Renaut

> begins a multiplying and mingling of the two common *topoi* of the damsel and the portrait that complicates the function of each beyond that of mere narrative signs, and which tends to invalidate either attribute as an indicator of a potential heroine ... . The damsel in distress motif is multiplied until neither audience nor hero can rightly judge which lady he is 'supposed' to choose.[521]

Renaut de Bâgé introduces deliberate confusion over which location will be Guinglain's final goal and the identity of the primary heroine whom he will marry.

La Pucele retains her distinctive, and potentially subversive, character but is sidelined almost completely out of the romance by its conclusion. It appears that Guinglain has turned his back on her permanently in favour of a more conventional

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[518] Sara Sturm, 'Magic in *Le Bel Inconnu*', *L'Esprit créateur*, 12 (1972), 19-25 (p. 19).
[519] Strictly speaking, Ile d'Or is always referred to in the text as a *vile* or *castiel*, while only Senaudon is described as a *cité* (as well as also being a *vile* or *castiel*), which perhaps serves as an indication of the pre-eminence that Senaudon will finally attain over its rival.
[520] Labbé, 'Paysage urbain', p. 21.
[521] Simons, 'The Squire, the Dwarf and the Damsel', pp. 29-30.

romance wife and kingdom, and a position within the traditional Arthurian structure. Unquiet elements, however, cannot be erased entirely once introduced into a tale, and the narrator's final words (addressed supposedly to his own lover) give pause for thought by recalling, even at the tale's apparent ending, the presence of the marginalised Ile d'Or and la Pucele:

> Mais por un biau sanblant mostrer
> Vos feroit Guinglain retrover
> S'amie, que il a perdue,
> Qu'entre ses bras le tenroit nue. (6255-8)
>
> [If you show him [i.e. the narrator] a gracious countenance,
> then Guinglain will once more find
> his lady, whom he has lost,
> and hold her naked in his arms.]

Colby-Hall argues that 'in the history of courtly romance, there is no earlier example of an author's awareness that his material is fictitious and can therefore be manipulated in such a way as to frustrate the reader'.[522] Renaut displays continual recognition of alternative possibilities, thereby emphasising the fictional nature of his work, and exploiting the romance form to the full.

Le Bel Inconnu and *Partonope of Blois* both conclude with marriage between the hero and a wealthy and beautiful heiress, but both nonetheless also demonstrate that romance space is not always entirely predictable or easy to read. Perhaps one reason why cities do not appear more often in medieval romance in such a foregrounded position as in *Le Bel Inconnu* and *Partonope* is that they signify such potentially subversive loci. City space does not generally provide a suitable environment for an active hero, and may also call into question the traditional knightly ethos itself.

The ending of *Le Bel Inconnu*, which sees Guinglain take up residence in Senaudon, therefore leaves the reader in some doubt as to whether or not the hero has made the right decision. His first departure from Ile d'Or, in order to pursue his original quest, showed that he would put chivalric duty above romantic love and, justifiably enough, finish the adventure that he had set out to achieve. The second time he

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[522] Alice M. Colby-Hall, 'Frustration and Fulfillment: the Double Ending of the *Bel Inconnu*', *Yale French Studies*, 67 (1984), 120-34 (p. 125). For further discussion of the ending, see Laurence de Looze, 'Generic Clash, Reader Response, and the Poetics of the Non-Ending in *Le Bel Inconnu*', in *Courtly Literature*, ed. by Busby and Kooper, pp. 113-23.

abandons la Pucele, however, Guinglain seems to act upon a less worthy motivation. He turns away from Ile d'Or and his lover because of what appears to be his insatiable and selfish desire for knightly prowess and against the advice of la Pucele, who foresees that his departure will be permanent. His subsequent marriage to Esmerée is no happy ending and Guinglain continues to love la Pucele. Colby-Hall rightly sees this as antithetical to the romance ideal:

> Such tales are not written to celebrate the marriage of convenience – to which they are hostile by definition – but the *mariage d'amour* or a permanent liaison characterized by mutual devotion.[523]

The narrator's final suggestion that he might be persuaded to continue and allow Guinglain to return to la Pucele still leaves the audience dissatisfied. He implies that the hero ought to be reunited with la Pucele, but it is unclear how this could be achieved since he is now married to Esmerée.

The conclusion of *Partonope of Blois*, by contrast, is much more definite. As is to be expected in a romance, Partonope's experiences do not stimulate any great psychological developments in his character, yet by the time he returns to Chef d'Oire all relationships between the three main protagonists of this tale (by this I mean Partonope, Melior and the city) have been thoroughly renegotiated and a very different power balance established. Partonope is forced to use his own initiative to travel to the tournament at Chef d'Oire after being thrown off course and into imprisonment by Armant. This ensures that he forges an identity of his own and is not merely to be the creation of Melior's sister, Urake, who has helped him to recover after his time in the forest. Eley and Simons accurately point out that 'the storm which then takes him to Armant's castle effectively removes him from her [Urake's] sphere of influence, both geographically and psychologically'.[524] Partonope's new autonomy is signalled by his friendship with the Spanish knight, Gaudin, whereby he gains support and strength from a male alliance rather than remaining any longer under female dominion.

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[523] Colby-Hall, 'Frustration and Fulfillment', p. 122.

[524] Eley and Simons, '*Partonopeus de Blois* and Chrétien', p. 329. They add that 'Partonopeus under the tutelage of Urraque is only marginally more autonomous than he was as Melior's toy-boy in the first part of the romance: he has to break away from her, too, before he can achieve self-actualisation'.

From my reading of *Partonope* and *Le Bel Inconnu*, I would have to conclude that a knight cannot reside for any length of time in a town or city. Should he marry a female ruler, and thereby assume control over a city or realm, he must change. Although he may still be a knight in name, he can no longer be termed a knight errant and the possibilities for future adventure are all but gone. In such cases, the story must end as the knight's marriage signals his retirement from chivalric adventure. That is not, however, to say that urban space cannot be used to good effect as a romance setting. Indeed, the authors of both the texts discussed in this chapter prove without a doubt the viability of urban locations in their romances. They create spaces that have elements of subversion or perversion (particularly in the case of the Gaste Cité, held in thrall by evil enchantment), but then they explore ways in which these places can be absorbed safely into the overall narrative structure, and do so very successfully. *Partonope's* author completely eradicates the subversive image of Chef d'Oire and Melior, while Renaut de Bâgé introduces the conventional marriage for his hero but also deliberately retains some of the elements that are seemingly opposed to the Arthurian world in order to create his enigmatic ending.

Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to look in detail at four thematic and structural elements of medieval romance narratives, all of which have in common an association with movement and travel or, in the case of cities, the converse: immobility. I have explored the range of contexts in which horses, ships, tents and cities commonly occur, tracing their roots in older sources where possible and following in particular the development of the story motifs from French texts through to Middle English literature. All the subjects of my four chapters are features in the landscape of romance and contribute more than may be initially apparent to the texts in which they appear. While all four have important functional roles, they are also frequently the objects of the exaggerated, superlative description that is so characteristic of romances.[525] Used as flourishes by the romance writer, embellishments to give his work of art more finesse or grandeur, horses, ships, tents and cities can all become spectacular details. Thus, as we have seen, there are numerous memorable examples from each of the four categories, such as Alexander's steed Bucephalas, the magical ship of Marie de France's *Guigemar*, Eneas's tent-fortress and the wonderful city of Chef d'Oire in *Partonope of Blois*.

The first two chapters concentrated on horses and ships, the primary role of which is to relocate protagonists within the geography of the tale. Each allows the author to move characters swiftly between different settings and thereby eliminate uninteresting or irrelevant in-between space. Horses and ships nonetheless differ quite significantly, and do not signal the same types of journey. Travel by ship may be used to suggest that long distances have been traversed, and frequently introduces exotic or otherworldly locations, places that are generally thought of as 'far-off'. Journeys over the sea know no bounds – quite literally in an age in which mapping was in its infancy.

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[525] John Stevens terms this the 'essential idealism of romance' and further observes that 'the "characters" of romance are white and black, good men and bad men, saints and devils. Wickedness is idealized as well as goodness; there is very little room in romance for the comfortable smudgy greys of ordinary life ... ': in *Medieval Romance: Themes and Approaches* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), pp. 20 and 169. See also Edmond Faral's discussion of hyperbolic description as a characteristic of French romance of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in *Recherches sur les sources latines des contes et romans courtois du moyen âge* (Paris: Champion, 1913), pp. 307-28.

The boats and ships of romance are often outside the control of their passengers, and take them into the unknown. Even when the hero can direct his course, or instruct sailors on his chosen destination, the vessel can soon be reduced to the mercy of the elements or divine powers by treacherous weather. Despite the strength of association of the knight with his horse, we have seen that there are a surprisingly large number of instances of travel by ship or boat in medieval romance. The topoi of the rudderless boat and the enchanted ship are particularly popular and well-known. There are in addition, however, many story motifs based around storms and shipwrecks, deriving from biblical and classical precedents. Such episodes in romance often draw upon Christian beliefs or ancient superstition and thereby create powerful drama.

Unlike the ship, the horse is immediately synonymous with the knight-hero of romance. As well as enabling him to travel and joust, it is also an essential part of his badge of identity, indicating his class and role in society. The link often goes much deeper, however, with writers exploiting the importance of the partnership between man and equine in order to criticise or praise the rider. Interestingly, the connection may be so strong as to compete with, or even preclude, a relationship with a lover; many romances feature triangles comprising knight, lady and horse and dramatise the problems that can be caused by competing demands on the hero. As the fourth chapter shows, ladies and cities can be seen as obstacles to the active life of chivalric adventure that is instantly suggested by the figure of a knight on horseback.

Thus it would seem that a tent or pavilion would be an ideal compromise for the hero, allowing him to move around freely since it can be repositioned at will while furthermore providing him with suitably noble accommodation at all times (in which he can also accommodate his lover, and even his horse). As we have seen, however, knights who travel with pavilions, such as Tristram, turn out to be the exception rather than the rule since most knight-heroes travel without the retinue necessary to carry and pitch tented accommodation. My third chapter explored in depth the many and varied uses of tents in romance and the sorts of characters, ranging from King Arthur to the fairy mistress, who are associated with them. As elements of a landscape, tents can be instantly evocative and provide the backdrop for most tournaments and sieges in

romance. Tents are not only essentially practical, but are often also important for display purposes, making statements about their owners' power, wealth or identity. Similarly, the way in which the tent structure allows characters to interact with their surroundings is of particular interest. Pitching a tent or pavilion is often a claim to certain rights over a piece of ground, and transforms the nature of that space. In a martial context, for example, an encampment may symbolise a threat to a besieged castle; alternatively, in the middle of a forest a pavilion frequently encloses a private space in which lovers can meet, free from the usual restrictions on courtly behaviour. The most fascinating aspect of the tent is its deceptively simple nature, and the fact that it is available to romance writers as a backdrop for so many different contexts.

By contrast, the city is a far more restrictive type of setting that has little room to accommodate the typical hero of romance, whose active lifestyle seems opposed to the city's immobility. Usually the city marks the end of a knight's quest and adventures; if he is involved with urban space at all, it is usually to claim a suitable heiress who lives in a town or city. Usually the knight must symbolically dismount in order to marry, and thereby exchange his roaming for a static life governing a kingdom. As the authors of *Le Bel Inconnu* and *Partonope of Blois* clearly demonstrate, however, when cities and towns do feature more prominently in a romance (along with the women that are closely identified with them), the continuation of the tale can be fascinating in the problems that it sets and resolves.

I have sought, in this thesis, to foreground four elements of medieval romance that we as readers tend to take for granted. Horses, ships and tents are common enough to excite no particular attention in the vast majority of cases. This is despite the fact that each plays a significant role in the mechanics of romance, and is involved in a remarkable variety of topoi and story motifs. Horses, ships and tents are all characteristic features of the knight's journey through romance space, and symbolise the freedom of this stage of knighthood. Nonetheless even romance, for all its escapism, does not avoid forever the fact that a knight is a member of a wider society and is expected (in the majority of cases) to settle down with a wife and produce the next

generation of heroes. Although the city may initially seem a contrast to my preceding three topics, it can be seen as the logical conclusion of the knight's journey.

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